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## Keats's Letters





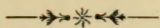






*The Complete Works of*

JOHN KEATS



vol. 4.

LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS

EDITED BY

Nathan Haskell Dole



Illustrated

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## Preface

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REGARDED as pure literature, the work of Keats has qualities which place it close to that of Shakespeare. It is not claimed for him that he is the greatest English poet since Shakespeare. Such a claim were impious to the memory of Milton, of Wordsworth,

of Shelley, of Byron, — not to mention others who have followed Shakespeare in the long and glorious roll of our poets. The term “great poet” is comprehensive: before using it one weighs the claimant’s intellect, his imagination, his psychic energy, his powers of creation generally. It could not be maintained that in all these points Keats was supreme, even in his generation; but it might well be conceded that, in the differentia of his mind and style, there is a magic, a majesty, a power of realizing conceptions wholly poetic in a manner wholly poetic, such as no English poet since Shakespeare had possessed, unless indeed it were Milton.

It is of Keats as a letter-writer that a few words are needed in this place. If to be true, interesting, attractive, witty, humourous, idealistic, realistic, speculative, discursive, and gossippy in turns is the note of a good letter-writer, then indeed Keats was one. If to tell one’s friends



## Preface

just what they want to know about one's doings and thoughts, and about the doings and thoughts of mutual friends, is to be a good letter-writer — that is where Keats, of all men of genius in this century, excelled. If consideration for the feelings of others in the manner and degree of communicating misfortunes or disagreeables be an epistolary virtue, Keats was largely dowered with that virtue. If to present a true picture of the essential qualities of one's personality is a valuable art, Keats manifested that art in a high form in his letters. And if, when wrung by disease and misery, it is better to leave some record for a pitying posterity than to carry a ghastly secret into the oblivion of the grave, then in this also Keats exceeded others who have made the world richer with their letters. True it is that, in reading Keats's letters with a fresh eye, one never knows whether the next precious stone one comes to, embedded in one of his racy, lively, inimitably good-tempered and well-conditioned prose pages, will be of the one mood or the other.

I think Keats's letters without those to Fanny Brawne very much like "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark. The Letters to Fanny Brawne, as here placed side by side with those to Fanny Keats and other correspondents of the poet, are specially commended to the fresh apprehension of those who care to know Keats thoroughly in all moods of his mind and all phases of his temper. There is nothing for any one to be afraid of — nothing that any man or woman need blush to have overheard through that good hap which preserved these records. Above all, the letters are irrevocably with us; and, being with us, they complete the picture of the true Keats. Taken in their proper context, they redound to his honour. That a man placed as he was, endowed by nature as he was, refined by art as he was, and tortured by bodily disease and mental agony as he was, should yet mingle with the bitterness of

## Preface

his cry of despair such sweetness and sanity as are the ruling characteristics throughout the letters even to Fanny Brawne, is a standing wonder.

H. BUXTON FORMAN.

46 MARLBOROUGH HILL, ST. JOHN'S WOOD,  
*August, 1895.*







## Keats's Letters



### I.

TO CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE

[31 October 1816]



Y DAIN'TIE DAVIE:—I will be as punctual as the Bee to the Clover. Very glad am I at the thoughts of seeing so soon this glorious Haydon and all his creation. I pray thee let me know when you go to Ollier's and where he resides—this I forgot to ask you—and tell me also when you will help me waste a sullen day—God 'ield you—

J K

### II.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

20 November 1816

MY DEAR SIR:—Last evening wrought me up, and I cannot forbear sending you the following.



## Keats's Letters

Great spirits now on earth are sojourning;  
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,  
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,  
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:<sup>1</sup>  
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,  
The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:<sup>2</sup>  
And lo! — whose stedfastness would never take  
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.  
And other spirits there are standing apart  
Upon the forehead of the age to come;  
These, these will give the world another heart,  
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum  
Of mighty workings in some distant Mart?  
Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.

Yours unfeignedly  
JOHN KEATS —

Removed to 76 Cheapside

### III.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Thursday afternoon, 20 November 1816.

[*Imperfect Postmark*, No. 21]

MY DEAR SIR: — Your letter has filled me with a proud pleasure, and shall be kept by me as a stimulus to exertion — I begin to fix my eye upon one horizon. My feelings entirely fall in with yours in regard to the Ellipsis, and I glory in it. The Idea of your sending it to Wordsworth put me out of breath — you know with what Reverence I would send my Well-wishes to him.

Yours sincerely  
JOHN KEATS

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth.

<sup>2</sup> Leigh Hunt.

## Keats's Letters

### IV.

TO CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE

Tuesday —

[*Postmark*, Lombard Street,  
17 December 1816.]

MY DEAR CHARLES: — You may now look at Minerva's Ægis with impunity, seeing that my awful Visage did not turn you into a John Doree. You have accordingly a legitimate title to a Copy — I will use my interest to procure it for you. I'll tell you what — I met Reynolds at Haydon's a few mornings since — he promised to be with me this Evening and Yesterday I had the same promise from Severn and I must put you in Mind that on last All hallowmas' day you gave me your word that you would spend this Evening with me — so no putting off. I have done little to *Endymion*<sup>1</sup> lately — I hope to finish it in one more attack — I believe you I went to Richards's — it was so whoreson a Night that I stopped there all the next day. His Remembrances to you. (Ext. from the common place Book of my Mind — Mem. — Wednesday — Hampstead — call in Warner Street — a Sketch of Mr. Hunt.) — I will ever consider you my sincere and affectionate friend — you will not doubt that I am your's.

God bless you —

JOHN KEATS —

<sup>1</sup> A short poem originally so called, but ultimately published in 1817 without a title. It begins with the words "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill."

## Keats's Letters

### V.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Sunday Evening [March 1817.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — Your kindness<sup>1</sup> affects me so sensibly that I can merely put down a few mono-sentences — your criticism only makes me extremely anxious that I should not deceive you.

It's the finest thing by God — as Hazlitt would say. However I hope I may not deceive you. — There are some acquaintances of mine who will scratch their Beards and although I have, I hope, some Charity, I wish their nails may be long. — I will be ready at the time you mention in all Happiness.

There is a report that a young Lady of 16 has written the new Tragedy God bless her — I will know her by Hook or by Crook in less than a week — My Brothers' and my Remembrances to your kind sisters.

yours most sincerely

JOHN KEATS

### VI.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

[March 1817.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — My Brothers are anxious that I should go by myself into the country — they have always been extremely fond of me, and now that Haydon has

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds praised him in a sonnet.

## Keats's Letters

pointed out how necessary it is that I should be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow. So I shall soon be out of Town. You must soon bring all your present troubles to a close, and so must I, but we must, like the Fox, prepare for a fresh swarm of flies. Banish money — Banish sofas — Banish Wine — Banish Music; but right Jack Health, honest Jack Health, true Jack Health — Banish Health and banish all the world. I must . . . myself . . . <sup>1</sup> if I come this evening, I shall horribly commit myself elsewhere. So I will send my excuses to them and Mrs. Dilke by my brothers.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

### VII.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Tuesday Morn — [15 April 1817].

[*Postmark* 16 April 1817.]

MY DEAR BROTHERS: — I am safe at Southampton — after having ridden three stages outside and the rest in for it began to be very cold. I did not know the Names of any of the Towns I passed through — all I can tell you is that sometimes I saw dusty Hedges — sometimes Ponds — then nothing — then a little Wood with trees look you like Launce's Sister "as white as a Lilly and as small as a Wand" — then came houses which died away into a few straggling Barns — then came hedge trees aforesaid again. As the Lamplight crept along the following things were

<sup>1</sup> Original letter torn.



## Keats's Letters

discovered — “long heath broom furze” — Hurdles here and there half a Mile — Park palings when the Windows of a House were always discovered by reflection — One Nymph of Fountain — *N. B. Stone* — lopped Trees — Cow ruminating — ditto Donkey — Man and Woman going gingerly along — William seeing his Sisters over the Heath — John waiting with a Lanthorn for his Mistress — Barber's Pole — Doctor's Shop — However after having had my fill of these I popped my Head out just as it began to Dawn — *N. B. this tuesday Morn saw the Sun rise* — of which I shall say nothing at present. I felt rather lonely this Morning at breakfast so I went and unbox'd a Shakspeare — “There's my Comfort” — I went immediately after Breakfast to Southampton Water where I enquired for the Boat to the Isle of Wight as I intend seeing that place before I settle — it will go at 3, so shall I after having taken a Chop — I know nothing of this place but that it is long — tolerably broad — has bye streets — two or three Churches — a very respectable old Gate with two Lions to guard it — the Men and Women do not materially differ from those I have been in the Habit of seeing — I forgot to say that from dawn till half past six I went through a most delightful Country — some open Down but for the most part thickly wooded. What surprised me most was an immense quantity of blooming Furze on each side the road cutting a most rural dash. The Southampton Water when I saw it just now was no better than a low-water Water which did no more than answer my expectations — it will have mended its Manners by 3. From the Wharf are seen the shores on each side stretching to the Isle of Wight. You, Haydon, Reynolds &c. have been pushing each other out of my Brain by turns — I have conned over every Head in Haydon's Picture — you must warn them not to be afraid should my Ghost visit them on Wednesday — tell Haydon to

## Keats's Letters

Kiss his Hand at Betty over the Way for me yea and to spy at her for me. I hope one of you will be competent to take part in a Trio while I am away — you need only aggravate your voices a little and mind not to speak Cues and all — when you have said Rum-ti-ti — you must not be rum any more or else another will take up the ti-ti alone and then he might be taken God shield us for little better than a Titmouse. By the by talking of Titmouse Remember me particularly to all my Friends — give my Love to the Miss Reynoldses and to Fanny who I hope you will soon see. Write to me soon about them all — and you George particularly how you get on with Wilkinson's plan. What could I have done without my Plaid? I don't feel inclined to write any more at present for I feel rather muzzy — you must be content with this fac simile of the rough plan of Aunt Dinah's Counterpane.<sup>1</sup>

Your most affectionate Brother

JOHN KEATS

Reynolds shall hear from me soon.

## VIII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Carisbrooke, April 17th, 1817.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — Ever since I wrote to my Brothers from Southampton, I have been in a taking, and at this moment I am about to become settled, for I have unpacked my books, put them into a snug corner, pinned up Haydon, Mary Queen of Scots, and Milton with his daughters in a row. In the passage I found a head of

<sup>1</sup> The letter was "crossed," so as to resemble roughly a chess-board or a patchwork quilt.

## Keats's Letters

Shakspeare, which I had not before seen. It is most likely the same that George spoke so well of, for I like it extremely. Well — this head I have hung over my books, just above the three in a row, having first discarded a French Ambassador — now this alone is a good morning's work. Yesterday I went to Shanklin, which occasioned a great debate in my mind whether I should live there or at Carisbrooke. Shanklin is a most beautiful place; sloping wood and meadow ground reach round the Chine, which is a cleft between the Cliffs of the depth of nearly 300 feet at least. This cleft is filled with trees and bushes in the narrow part, and as it widens becomes bare, if it were not for primroses on one side, which spread to the very verge of the Sea, and some fishermen's huts on the other, perched midway in the Balustrades of beautiful green Hedges along their steps down to the sands. But the sea, Jack, the sea — the little waterfall — then the white cliff — then St. Catherine's Hill — "the sheep in the meadows, the cows in the corn." Then, why are you at Carisbrooke? say you. Because, in the first place, I should be at twice the Expense, and three times the inconvenience — next that from here I can see your continent — from a little hill close by, the whole north Angle of the Isle of Wight, with the water between us. In the 3rd place, I see Carisbrooke Castle from my window, and have found several delightful wood-alleys, and copses, and quick freshes. As for primroses, the Island ought to be called Primrose Island — that is, if the nation of Cowslips agree thereto, of which there are divers Clans just beginning to lift up their heads. Another reason of my fixing is, that I am more in reach of the places around me. I intend to walk over the Island east — West — North — South. I have not seen many specimens of Ruins — I don't think however I shall ever see one to surpass Carisbrooke Castle. The trench is overgrown with the smooth-

## Keats's Letters

est turf, and the Walls with ivy. The Keep within side is one Bower of ivy — a colony of Jackdaws have been there for many years. I dare say I have seen many a descendant of some old cawer who peeped through the bars at Charles the First, when he was there in Confinement. On the road from Cowes to Newport I saw some extensive Barracks, which disgusted me extremely with the Government for placing such a Nest of Debauchery in so beautiful a place. I asked a man on the coach about this — and he said that the people had been spoiled. In the room where I slept at Newport, I found this on the Window — “O Isle spoilt by the Military!” I must in honesty however confess that I did not feel very sorry at the idea of the Women being a little profligate.

The wind is in a sulky fit, and I feel that it would be no bad thing to be the favourite of some Fairy, who would give one the power of seeing how our Friends got on at a Distance. I should like, of all Loves, a sketch of you and Tom and George in ink which Haydon will do if you tell him how I want them. From want of regular rest I have been rather *nervus* — and the passage in “Lear” — “Do you not hear the sea?” — has haunted me intensely.

April 18th [1817].

Will you have the goodness to do this? Borrow a Botanical Dictionary — turn to the words Laurel and Prunus, show the explanations to your sisters and Mrs. Dilke and without more ado let them send me the Cups, Basket and Books they trifled and put off and off while I was in Town. Ask them what they can say for themselves — ask Mrs. Dilke wherefore she does so distress me — let me know how Jane has her health — the Weather is unfavourable for her. — Tell George and Tom to write. I'll tell you what — on the 23d was Shakespeare born.



## Keats's Letters

Now if I should receive a letter from you, and another from my Brothers on that day 'twould be a parlous good thing. Whenever you write say a word or two on some Passage in Shakespeare that may have come rather new to you, which must be continually happening, notwithstanding that we read the same Play forty times — for instance, the following from the "Tempest" never struck me so forcibly as at present,

"Urchins

*Shall, for the vast of night that they may work,  
All exercise on thee —*"

How can I help bringing to your mind the line —

*"In the dark backward and abysm of time."*

I find I cannot exist without Poetry — without eternal Poetry — half the day will not do — the whole of it — I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan. I had become all in a Tremble from not having written anything of late — the Sonnet over-leaf did me good. I slept the better last night for it — this Morning, however, I am nearly as bad again. Just now I opened Spenser, and the first Lines I saw were these —

"The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,  
And is with child of glorious great intent,  
Can never rest until it forth have brought  
Th' eternal brood of glory excellent —"

Let me know particularly about Haydon, ask him to write to me about Hunt, if it be only ten lines — I hope all is well — I shall forthwith begin my Endymion,<sup>1</sup> which I

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the real "Endymion," to be published in the following year.





## Keats's Letters

hope I shall have got some way with by the time you come, when we will read our verses in a delightful place I have set my heart upon, near the Castle. Give my Love to your Sisters severally — to George and Tom. Remember me to Rice, Mr. and Mrs. Dilke and all we know.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

Direct J. Keats, Mrs. Cook's, New Village, Carisbrooke.

### IX.

TO LEIGH HUNT

Margate, 10 May 1817

MY DEAR HUNT: — The little gentleman that sometimes lurks in a gossip's bowl, ought to have come in the very likeness of a *roasted* crab, and choaked me outright for not answering your letter ere this: however, you must not suppose that I was in town to receive it: no, it followed me to the Isle of Wight, and I got it just as I was going to pack up for Margate, for reasons which you anon shall hear. On arriving at this treeless affair, I wrote to my brother George to request C[harles] C[owden] C[larke] to do the thing you wot of respecting "Rimini"; and George tells me he has undertaken it with great pleasure; so I hope there has been an understanding between you for many proofs: C. C. C. is well acquainted with Bensley. Now why did you not send the key of your cupboard, which, I know, was full of papers? We would have locked them all in a trunk, together with those you told me to destroy, which indeed I did not do, for fear of demolishing receipts, there not being a more unpleasant



## Keats's Letters

thing in the world (saving a thousand and one others) than to pay a bill twice. Mind you, old Wood's a "very varmint," shrouded in covetousness:—and now I am upon a horrid subject—what a horrid one you were upon last Sunday, and well you handled it. The last *Examiner* was a battering-ram against Christianity, blasphemy, Tertullian, Erasmus, Sir Philip Sidney; and then the dreadful Petzelians and their expiation by blood; and do Christians shudder at the same thing in a newspaper which they attribute to their God in its most aggravated form? What is to be the end of this? I must mention Hazlitt's Southey. O that he had left out the grey hairs; or that they had been in any other paper not concluding with such a thunderclap! That sentence about making a page of the feeling of a whole life, appears to me like a whale's back in the sea of prose. I ought to have said a word on Shakspeare's Christianity. There are two which I have not looked over with you, touching the thing: the one for, the other against: that in favour is in "Measure for Measure," Act II., Scene 2,

"*Isab.* Alas, alas!  
Why all the souls that were, were forfeit once;  
And he that might the 'vantage best have took,  
Found out the remedy."

That against is in "Twelfth Night," Act III., Scene 2,

"*Maria.* For there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly, can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness."

Before I come to the "Nymphs,"<sup>1</sup> I must get through all disagreeables. I went to the Isle of Wight, thought so

<sup>1</sup> A poem in Hunt's "Foliage."

## Keats's Letters

much about poetry, so long together, that I could not get to sleep at night; and, moreover, I know not how it was, I could not get wholesome food. By this means, in a week or so, I became not over capable in my upper stories, and set off pell-mell for Margate, at least a hundred and fifty miles, because, forsooth, I fancied that I should like my old lodging here, and could contrive to do without trees. Another thing, I was too much in solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought, as an only resource. However, Tom is with me at present, and we are very comfortable. We intend, though, to get among some trees. How have you got on among them? How are the "Nymphs"? I suppose they have led you a fine dance. Where are you now? — in Judea, Cappadocia, or the parts of Libya about Cyrene? Stranger from "Heaven, Hues, and Prototypes," I wager you have given several new turns to the old saying, "Now the maid was fair and pleasant to look on," as well as made a little variation in "Once upon a time." Perhaps, too, you have rather varied, "Here endeth the first lesson." Thus I hope you have made a horseshoe business of "unsuperfluous life," "faint bowers," and fibrous roots. I vow that I have been down in the mouth lately at this work. These last two days, however, I have felt more confident — I have asked myself so often why I should be a poet more than other men, seeing how great a thing it is, — how great things are to be gained by it, what a thing to be in the mouth of Fame, — that at last the idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment, that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton. Yet 'tis a disgrace to fail, even in a huge attempt; and at this moment I drive the thought from me. I began my poem about a fortnight since, and have done some every day, except travelling ones. Perhaps I may have done a good deal for the time, but it appears

## Keats's Letters

such a pin's point to me, that I will not copy any out. When I consider that so many of these pin-points go to form a bodkin-point, (God send I end not my life with a bare bodkin, in its modern sense!) and that it requires a thousand bodkins to make a spear bright enough to throw any light to posterity, I see nothing but continual up-hill journeying. Now is there any thing more unpleasant (it may come among the thousand and one) than to be so journeying and to miss the goal at last? But I intend to whistle all these cogitations into the sea, where I hope they will breed storms violent enough to block up all exit from Russia. Does Shelley go on telling strange stories of the deaths of kings? <sup>1</sup> Tell him, there are strange stories of the deaths of poets. Some have died before they were conceived. "How do you make that out, Master Vellum?" Does Mrs. S. cut bread and butter as neatly as ever? Tell her to procure some fatal scissors, and cut the thread of life of all to-be-disappointed poets. Does Mrs. Hunt tear linen as straight as ever? Tell her to tear from the book of life all blank leaves. Remember me to them all; to Miss Kent and the little ones all.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS ALIAS JUNKETS —

You shall hear where we move.

<sup>1</sup> Hunt records that Shelley was fond of quoting the passage in Shakespeare here alluded to, and of "applying it in the most unexpected manner."

## Keats's Letters

### X.

TO MESSRS. TAYLOR AND HESSEY

Margate, 16 May 1817.

MY DEAR SIRs:—I am extremely indebted to you for your liberality in the shape of manufactured rag, valued £20,<sup>1</sup> and shall immediately proceed to destroy some of the minor heads of that hydra the Dun; to conquer which the knight need have no Sword, Shield, Cuirass, Cuisses, Herbadgeon, Spear, Casque, Greaves, Paldrons, spurs, Chevron, or any other scaly commodity, but he need only take the Bank-note of Faith and Cash of Salvation, and set out against the monster, invoking the aid of no Archimago or Urganda, but finger me the paper, light as the Sybil's leaves in Virgil, whereat the fiend skulks off with his tail between his legs. Touch him with this enchanted paper, and he whips you his head away as fast as a snail's horn—but then the horrid propensity he has to put it up again has discouraged many very valiant Knights. He is such a never-ending still-beginning sort of a body, like my landlady of the Bell. I should conjecture that the very spright that "the green sour ringlets makes Whereof the ewe not bites" had manufactured it of the dew fallen on said sour ringlets. I think I could make a nice little allegorical poem, called "The Dun," where we would have the Castle of Carelessness, the Drawbridge of Credit, Sir Novelty Fashion's expedition against the City of Tailors, &c., &c. I went day by day at my poem for a Month—at the end of which time the other day I found my Brain so overwrought that I had neither rhyme nor reason in it—so

<sup>1</sup> An advance on account of "Endymion."



## Keats's Letters

was obliged to give up for a few days. I hope soon to be able to resume my work — I have endeavoured to do so once or twice; but to no purpose. Instead of Poetry, I have a swimming in my head and feel all the effects of a Mental debauch, lowness of Spirits, anxiety to go on without the power to do so, which does not at all tend to my ultimate progression. However to-morrow I will begin my next month. This evening I go to Canterbury, having got tired of Margate. I was not right in my head when I came. At Canterbury I hope the remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a Billiard Ball. I am glad to hear of Mr. T.'s health, and of the welfare of the "In-town-stayers," and think Reynolds will like his Trip — I have some idea of seeing the Continent some time this summer. In repeating how sensible I am of your kindness, I remain

Your obed<sup>t</sup> serv<sup>t</sup> and friend,  
JOHN KEATS.

I shall be happy to hear any little intelligence in the literary or friendly way when you have time to scribble.

### XI.

TO MESSRS. TAYLOR AND HESSEY

10 July 1817.

MY DEAR SIRs: — I must endeavour to lose my maiden-head with respect to money Matters as soon as possible — and I will too — so, here goes! A couple of Duns that I thought would be silent till the beginning, at least, of next month (when I am certain to be on my legs, for certain sure), have opened upon me with a cry most "untunable"; never did you hear such *un-*"gallant chid-



## Keats's Letters

ing." Now you must know, I am not desolate, but have, thank God, 25 good notes in my fob. But then, you know, I laid them by to write with and would stand at bay a fortnight ere they should grab me. In a month's time I must pay, but it would relieve my mind if I owed you, instead of these Pelican duns.

I am afraid you will say I have "wound about with circumstance," when I should have asked plainly — however as I said I am a little maidenish or so, and I feel my virginity come strong upon me, the while I request the loan of a £20 and a £10, which, if you would enclose to me, I would acknowledge and save myself a hot forehead. I am sure you are confident of my responsibility, and in the sense of squareness that is always in me.

Your obliged friend

JOHN KEATS.

## XII.

TO JANE<sup>1</sup> AND MARIANE REYNOLDS

Oxf—[ord, 5 Sept. 1817.]

MY DEAR FRIENDS:—You are I am glad to hear comfortable at Hampton,<sup>2</sup> where I hope you will receive the Biscuits we ate the other night at Little Britain. I hope you found them good. There you are among Sands, stones, Pebbles, Beeches, Cliffs, Rocks, Deeps, Shallows, weeds, Ships Boats (at a distance), Carrots, Turnips, sun, moon, and stars and all those sort of things — here am I among Colleges, halls, Stalls, Plenty of Trees, thank God — Plenty of water, thank heaven — Plenty of Books, thank the Muses — Plenty of Snuff, thank Sir Walter

<sup>1</sup> Afterward Mrs. Thomas Hood.    <sup>2</sup> Littlehampton.

## Keats's Letters

Raleigh — Plenty of segars, — Ditto — Plenty of Flat country, thank Tellus's rolling pin — I'm on the sofa — Buonaparte is on the snuff-box — But you are by the sea side — argal, you bathe — you walk — you say "how beautiful" — find out resemblances between waves and camels — rocks and dancing masters — fireshovels and telescopes — Dolphins and Madonas — which word, by the way, I must acquaint you was derived from the Syriac, and came down in a way which neither of you I am sorry to say are at all capable of comprehending — but as a time may come when by your occasional converse with me you may arrive at "something like prophetic Strain," I will unbar the gates of my pride and let my condescension stalk forth like a Ghost at the Circus. — The word Madon-a, my dear Ladies — or — the word Mad-o-na — so I say! I am not mad. — Howsumever when that aged Tamer Kewthon sold a certain camel called Peter to the overseer of the Babel Sky works, he thus spake, adjusting his cravat round the tip of his chin — "My dear Tensory-up-in-air! this here Beast, though I say it as shouldn't say't, not only has the power of subsisting 40 days and 40 nights without fire and candle but he can sing — Here I have in my Pocket a Certificate from Signor Nicolini of the King's Theatre; a Certificate to this effect + + + + + " I have had dinner since I left that effect upon you, and feel too heavy in mentibus to display all the Profundity of the Polygon — so you had better each of you take a glass of cherry Brandy and drink to the health of Archimedes, who was of so benign a disposition that he never would leave Syracuse in his life — so kept himself out of all Knight Errantry. — This I know to be a fact; for it is written in the 45<sup>th</sup> book of Win-kine's treatise on garden-rollers, that he trod on a fish-woman's toe in Liverpool, and never begged her pardon. Now the long and short is this — that is by comparison —

## Keats's Letters

for a long day may be a short year — a long Pole may be a very stupid fellow as a man. But let us refresh ourself from this depth of thinking, and turn to some innocent jocularity — the Bow cannot always be bent — nor the gun always loaded, if you ever let it off — and the life of man is like a great Mountain — his breath is like a Shrewsbury cake — he comes into the world like a shoe-black, and goes out of it like a cobbler — he eats like a chimney sweeper, drinks like a Gingerbread baker — and breathes like Achilles — so it being that we are such sub-lunary creatures, let us endeavour to correct all our bad spelling — all our most delightful abominations, and let us wish health to Marian and Jane, whoever they be and wherever —

your's truly

JOHN KEATS.

### XIII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Oxford, Sept. 10th [1817].

MY DEAR FANNY : — Let us now begin a regular question and answer — a little pro and con ; letting it interfere as a pleasant method of my coming at your favorite little wants and enjoyments, that I may meet them in a way befitting a brother.

We have been so little together since you have been able to reflect on things that I know not whether you prefer the History of King Pepin to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress — or Cinderella and her glass slipper to Moor's Almanack. However in a few Letters I hope I shall be able to come at that and adapt my scribblings to your Pleasure. You must tell me about all you read if it be

## Keats's Letters

only six Pages in a Week and this transmitted to me every now and then will procure you full sheets of Writing from me pretty frequently. — This I feel as a necessity for we ought to become intimately acquainted, in order that I may not only, as you grow up love you as my only Sister, but confide in you as my dearest friend. When I saw you last I told you of my intention of going to Oxford and 'tis now a Week since I disembark'd from his Whipship's Coach the *Defiance* in this place. I am living in Magdalen Hall on a visit to a young Man with whom I have not been long acquainted, but whom I like very much — we lead very industrious lives — he in general Studies and I in proceeding at a pretty good rate with a Poem which I hope you will see early in the next year. — Perhaps you might like to know what I am writing about. I will tell you. Many Years ago there was a young handsome Shepherd who fed his flocks on a Mountain's Side called *Latmus* — he was a very contemplative sort of a Person and lived solitary among the trees and Plains little thinking that such a beautiful Creature as the Moon was growing mad in Love with him. — However so it was; and when he was asleep on the Grass she used to come down from heaven and admire him excessively for a long time; and at last could not refrain from carrying him away in her arms to the top of that high Mountain *Latmus* while he was a dreaming — but I dare say [you] have read this and all the other beautiful Tales which have come down from the ancient times of that beautiful Greece. If you have not let me know and I will tell you more at large of others quite as delightful. This Oxford I have no doubt is the finest City in the world — it is full of old Gothic buildings — Spires — towers — Quadrangles — Cloisters — Groves &c. and is surrounded with more clear streams than ever I saw together. I take a Walk by the Side of one of them every Evening and,



## Keats's Letters

thank God, we have not had a drop of rain these many days. I had a long and interesting Letter from George, cross lines by a short one from Tom yesterday dated Paris. They both send their loves to you. Like most Englishmen they feel a mighty preference for every thing English — the French Meadows, the trees, the People, the Towns, the Churches, the Books, the every thing — although they may be in themselves good: yet when put in comparison with our green Island they all vanish like Swallows in October. They have seen Cathedrals, Manuscripts, Fountains, Pictures, Tragedy, Comedy, — with other things you may by chance meet with in this Country such a[s] Washerwomen, Lamplighters, Turnpikemen, Fishkettles, Dancing Masters, Kettle drums, Sentry Boxes, Rocking Horses &c. — and, now they have taken them over a set of boxing gloves. I have written to George and requested him, as you wish I should, to write to you. I have been writing very hard lately, even till an utter incapacity came on, and I feel it now about my head: so you must not mind a little out of the way sayings — though by the bye were my brain as clear as a bell I think I should have a little propensity thereto. I shall stop here till I have finished the 3rd Book of my Story; which I hope will be accomplish'd in at most three Weeks from to day — about which time you shall see me. How do you like Miss Taylor's essays in Rhyme — I just look'd into the Book and it appeared to me suitable to you — especially since I remember your liking for those pleasant little things the Original Poems — the essays are the more mature production of the same hand. While I was speaking about France it occurred to me to speak a few Words on their Language — it is perhaps the poorest one ever spoken since the jabbering in the Tower of Babel, and when you come to know that the real use and greatness of a Tongue is to be referred to its Literature — you will be astonished



## Keats's Letters

to find how very inferior it is to our native Speech. — I wish the Italian would supersede French in every school throughout the Country, for that is full of real Poetry and Romance of a kind more fitted for the Pleasure of Ladies than perhaps our own. — It seems that the only end to be gained in acquiring French is the immense accomplishment of speaking it — it is none at all — a most lamentable mistake indeed. Italian indeed would sound most musically from Lips which had began to pronounce it as early as French is crammed down our Mouths, as if we were young Jackdaws at the mercy of an overfeeding Schoolboy. Now Fanny you must write soon — and write all you think about, never mind what — only let me have a good deal of your writing — You need not do it all at once — be two or three or four day[s] about it, and let it be a diary of your little Life. You will preserve all my Letters and I will secure yours — and thus in the course of time we shall each of us have a good Bundle — which, hereafter, when things may have strangely altered and god knows what happened, we may read over together and look with pleasure on times past — that now are to come. Give my Respects to the Ladies — and so my dear Fanny I am ever

Your most affectionate Brother

JOHN

If you direct — Post Office, Oxford — your Letter will be brought to me. —

## Keats's Letters

### XIV.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Oxford,

Sunday Morning [21 September 1817].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—So you are determined to be my mortal foe—draw a Sword at me, and I will forgive—put a Bullet in my Brain, and I will shake it out as a dew-drop from the Lion's Mane—put me on a Grid-iron and I will fry with great complacency—but—oh, horror! to come upon me in the shape of a Dun!—send me bills! As I say to my Tailor, send me Bills and I'll never employ you more. However, needs must, when the devil drives: and for fear of “before and behind Mr. Honeycomb” I'll proceed. I have not time to elucidate the forms and shapes of the grass and trees; for, rot it! I forgot to bring my mathematical case with me, which unfortunately contained my triangular Prism so that the hues of the grass cannot be dissected for you.

For these last five or six days, we have had regularly a Boat on the Isis, and explored all the streams about, which are more in number than your eye-lashes. We sometimes skim into a Bed of rushes, and there become naturalized river-folks,—there is one particularly nice nest, which we have christened “Reynolds's Cove,” in which we have read Wordsworth, and talked as may be. I think I see you and Hunt meeting in the Pit.—What a very pleasant fellow he is, if he would give up the sovereignty of a room pro bono. What evenings we might pass with him, could we have him from Mrs. H. Failings I am always rather rejoiced to find in a man than sorry for; they bring us to a Level. He has them, but then his makes-up are very good. He agrees with the North-

## Keats's Letters

ern Poet in this, "He is not one of those who much delight to season their fireside with personal talk." I must confess, however, having a little itch that way, and at this present moment I have a few neighbourly remarks to make. The world, and especially our England, has, within the last thirty years, been vexed and teased by a set of devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an Acherontic promotion to a Torturer, purposely for their accommodation. These devils are a set of women, who having taken a snack or luncheon of Literary scraps, set themselves up for towers of Babel in languages, Sapphos in Poetry, Euclids in Geometry, and everything in nothing. The thing has made a very uncomfortable impression on me. I had longed for some real feminine Modesty in these things, and was therefore gladdened in the extreme on opening the other day one of Bailey's books — a book of poetry written by one beautiful Mrs. Philips, a friend of Jeremy Taylor's, and called "The Matchless Orinda." You must have heard of her, and most likely read her Poetry — I wish you have not, that I may have the pleasure of treating you with a few stanzas — I do it at a venture. You will not regret reading them once more. The following, to her friend Mrs. M. A. at parting, you will judge of.

"I have examin'd and do find,  
Of all that favour me  
There's none I grieve to leave behind  
But only, only thee.  
To part with thee I needs must die,  
Could parting sep'rate thee and I.

"But neither Chance nor Complement  
Did element our Love;  
'Twas sacred sympathy was lent  
Us from the Quire above.  
That Friendship Fortune did create,  
Still fears a wound from Time or Fate.

## Keats's Letters

"Our chang'd and mingled Souls are grown  
To such acquaintance now,  
That if each would resume their own,  
Alas! we know not how.  
We have each other so engrost,  
That each is in the Union lost.

"And thus we can no Absence know,  
Nor shall we be confin'd;  
Our active Souls will daily go  
To learn each others mind.  
Nay, should we never meet to Sense,  
Our Souls would hold Intelligence.

"Inspired with a Flame Divine  
I scorn to court a stay;  
For from that noble Soul of thine  
I ne're can be away.  
But I shall weep when thou dost grieve;  
Nor can I die whil'st thou dost live.

"By my own temper I shall guess  
At thy felicity,  
And only like my happiness  
Because it pleaseth thee.  
Our hearts at any time will tell  
If thou, or I, be sick, or well.

"All Honour sure I must pretend,  
All that is good or great;  
She that would be *Rosania's* Friend,  
Must be at least compleat.<sup>1</sup>  
If I have any bravery,  
'Tis cause I have so much of thee.

"Thy Leiger Soul in me shall lie,  
And all thy thoughts reveal;  
Then back again with mine shall flie,  
And thence to me shall steal.  
Thus still to one another tend;  
Such is the sacred name of *Friend*.

<sup>1</sup> A compleat friend — this line sounded very oddly to me at first.

## Keats's Letters

"Thus our twin-Souls in one shall grow,  
And teach the World new Love,  
Redeem the Age and Sex, and shew  
A Flame Fate dares not move:  
And courting Death to be our friend,  
Our Lives together too shall end.

"A Dew shall dwell upon our Tomb  
Of such a quality,  
That fighting Armies, thither come,  
Shall reconciled be.  
We'll ask no Epitaph, but say  
*ORINDA* and *ROSANIA*."

In other of her poems there is a most delicate fancy of the Fletcher kind — which we will con over together.

So Haydon is in Town. I had a letter from him yesterday. We will contrive as the winter comes on — but that is neither here nor there. Have you heard from Rice? Has Martin met with the Cumberland Beggar, or been wondering at the old Leech-gatherer? Has he a turn for fossils? that is, is he capable of sinking up to his Middle in a Morass? How is Hazlitt? We were reading his "Table"<sup>1</sup> last night. I know he thinks himself not estimated by ten people in the world — I wish he knew he is. I am getting on famous with my third Book — have written 800 lines thereof, and hope to finish it next Week. Bailey likes what I have done very much. Believe me, my dear Reynolds, one of my chief layings-up is the pleasure I shall have in showing it to you, I may now say, in a few days.

I have heard twice from my Brothers; they are going on very well, and send their Remembrances to you. We expected to have had notices from little-Hampton<sup>2</sup> this morning — we must wait till Tuesday. I am glad of their

<sup>1</sup> "The Round Table."

<sup>2</sup> From Jane and Mariane Reynolds.



## Keats's Letters

days with the Dilkes. You are, I know, very much teased in that precious London, and want all the rest possible ; so I shall be contented with as brief a scrawl — a Word or two, till there comes a pat hour.

Send us a few of your stanzas to read in "Reynolds's Cove." Give my Love and respects to your Mother and remember me kindly to all at home.

Yours faithfully

JOHN KEATS

I have left the doublings for Bailey, who is going to say that he will write to you to-morrow.

### XV.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Oxford, 28 September [1817].

MY DEAR HAYDON :—I read your letter to the young Man, whose Name is Cripps. He seemed more than ever anxious to avail himself of your offer. I think I told you we asked him to ascertain his Means. He does not possess the Philosopher's stone — nor Fortunatus' purse, nor Gyges' ring — but at Bailey's suggestion, whom I assure you is a very capital fellow, we have stumped up a kind of contrivance whereby he will be enabled to do himself the benefits you will lay in his Path. I have a great Idea that he will be a tolerable neat brush. 'Tis perhaps the finest thing that will befall him this many a year : for he is just of an age to get grounded in bad habits from which you will pluck him. He brought a copy of Mary Queen of Scots : it appears to me that he has copied the bad style of the painting, as well as coloured the eye-balls yellow like the original. He has also the fault that

## Keats's Letters

you pointed out to me in Hazlitt on the constringing and diffusing of substance. However I really believe that he will take fire at the sight of your Picture—and set about things. If he can get ready in time to return to town with me, which will be in a few days—I will bring him to you. You will be glad to hear that within these last three weeks I have written 1,000 lines—which are the third Book of my Poem. My Ideas with respect to it I assure you are very low—and I would write the subject thoroughly again—but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new Romance which I have in my eye for next summer—Rome was not built in a Day—and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next Poem. Bailey's kindest wishes and my vow of being

Yours eternally

JOHN KEATS—

### XVI.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Hampstead, Oct<sup>r</sup> Wednesday.

[8 October 1817.]

MY DEAR BAILEY:—After a tolerable journey I went from coach to Coach as far as Hampstead where I found my Brothers—the next Morning finding myself tolerably well I went to Lambs Conduit Street and delivered your parcel—Jane and Marianne were greatly improved, Marianne especially, she has no unhealthy plumpness in the face—but she comes me healthy and angular to the chin.—I did not see John—I was extremely sorry to hear that poor Rice, after having had capital health during

## Keats's Letters

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his tour, was very ill. I dare say you have heard from him. From No. 19 I went to Hunt's and Haydon's who live now neighbours — Shelley was there — I know nothing about anything in this part of the world — every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated — there's Haydon's picture in statu quo — There's Hunt walks up and down his painting room — criticising every head most unmercifully. There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt. "The web of our life is of mingled yarn." Haydon having removed entirely from Marlborough Street, Cripps must direct his letter to Lisson Grove, North Paddington. Yesterday Morning while I was at Brown's, in came Reynolds, he was pretty bobbish, we had a pleasant day — he would walk home at night that cursed cold distance. Mrs. Bentley's children are making a horrid row — whereby I regret I cannot be transported to your Room to write to you. I am quite disgusted with literary men and will never know another except Wordsworth — no not even Byron. Here is an instance of the friendship of such. Haydon and Hunt have known each other many years — now they live, pour ainsi dire, jealous neighbours — Haydon says to me, Keats, don't show your lines to Hunt on any Account or he will have done half for you — so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought. When he met Reynolds in the Theatre, John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4,000 lines — Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me they would have been 7,000! If he will say this to Reynolds, what would he to other people? Haydon received a Letter a little while back on this subject from some Lady — which contains a caution to me, thro' him, on the subject — now is not all this a most poultry thing to think about? You may see the whole of the case by the following Extract from a Letter I wrote to George in the Spring — "As to what you say about my being a Poet, I can return no Answer but by saying

## Keats's Letters

that the high Idea I have of poetical fame makes me think I see it towering too high above me. At any rate, I have no right to talk until *Endymion* is finished, it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination, and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed — by which I must make 4,000 lines of one bare circumstance, and fill them with poetry — and when I consider that this is a great task, and that when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the temple of fame — it makes me say — God forbid that I should be without such a task! I have heard Hunt say, and I may be asked — *why endeavour after a long Poem?* To which I should answer, Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in, where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer? Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? a Morning work at most.

“Besides, a long poem is a test of invention, which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails — and Imagination the rudder. — Did our great Poets ever write Short Pieces? I mean in the shape of Tales. This same invention seems indeed of late years to have been forgotten as a Poetical excellence — But enough of this, I put on no Laurels till I shall have finished *Endymion*, and I hope Apollo is not angered at my having made a Mockery at Hunt's —”

You see Bailey how independent my Writing has been. Hunt's dissuasion was of no avail — I refused to visit Shelley that I might have my own unfettered scope; — and after all, I shall have the Reputation of Hunt's élève. His corrections and amputations will by the knowing ones be traced in the Poem. This is, to be sure, the vexation of a day — nor would I say so many words about it to any



## Keats's Letters

but those whom I know to have my welfare and reputation at heart. Haydon promised to give directions for those Casts, and you may expect to see them soon, with as many Letters—You will soon hear the dinning of Bells—never mind! you and Gleig will defy the foul fiend—But do not sacrifice your health to Books: do take it kindly and not so voraciously. I am certain if you are your own Physician, your Stomach will resume its proper strength and then what great benefits will follow.—My sister wrote a Letter to me, which I think must be at the post-office—Ax Will to see. My Brother's kindest remembrances to you—we are going to dine at Brown's where I have some hopes of meeting Reynolds. The little Mercury I have taken has corrected the poison and improved my health—tho' I feel from my employment that I shall never be again secure in Robustness. Would that you were as well as

Your sincere friend and brother,

JOHN KEATS—

## XVII.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

[November 1817.]

MY DEAR BAILEY:—So you have got a Curacy—good, but I suppose you will be obliged to stop among your Oxford favourites during Term time. Never mind. When do you preach your first sermon?—tell me, for I shall propose to the two R.'s to hear it,—so don't look into any of the old corner oaken pews, for fear of being put out by us. Poor Johnny Moultrie can't be there. He is ill, I expect—but that's neither here nor there. All I can say, I wish him as well through it as I am like



## Keats's Letters

to be. For this fortnight I have been confined at Hampstead. Saturday evening was my first day in town, when I went to Rice's, — as we intend to do every Saturday till we know not when. We hit upon an old gent we had known some few years ago, and had a *veiry plaisante daye*. In this world there is no quiet, — nothing but teasing and snubbing and vexation. My brother Tom looked very unwell yesterday, and I am for shipping him off to Lisbon. Perhaps I ship there with him. I have not seen Mrs. Reynolds since I left you; wherefore my conscience smites me. I think of seeing her to-morrow; have you any message? I hope Gleig came soon after I left. I don't suppose I've written as many lines as you have read volumes, or at least chapters, since I saw you. However, I am in a fair way now to come to a conclusion in at least three weeks, when I assure you I shall be glad to dismount for a month or two; although I'll keep as tight a rein as possible till then, nor suffer myself to sleep. I will copy for you the opening of the Fourth Book, in which you will see from the manner I had not an opportunity of mentioning any poets, for fear of spoiling the effect of the passage by particularizing them.

Thus far had I written when I received your last, which made me at the sight of the direction caper for despair; but for one thing I am glad that I have been neglectful, and that is, therefrom I have received a proof of your utmost kindness, which at this present I feel very much, and I wish I had a heart always open to such sensations; but there is no altering a man's nature, and mine must be radically wrong, for it will lie dormant a whole month. This leads me to suppose that there are no men thoroughly wicked, so as never to be self-spiritualized into a kind of sublime misery; but, alas! 'tis but for an hour. He is the only Man "who has kept watch on man's mortality," who has philanthropy enough to overcome the

## Keats's Letters

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disposition to an indolent enjoyment of intellect, who is brave enough to volunteer for uncomfortable hours. You remember in Hazlitt's essay on commonplace people he says, "they read the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*, and think as they do."

Now, with respect to Wordsworth's "Gipsy," I think he is right, and yet I think Hazlitt is right, and yet I think Wordsworth is rightest. If Wordsworth had not been idle, he had not been without his task; nor had the "Gipsies" — they in the visible world had been as picturesque an object as he in the invisible. The smoke of their fire, their attitudes, their voices, were all in harmony with the evenings. It is a bold thing to say — and I would not say it in print — but it seems to me that if Wordsworth had thought a little deeper at that moment, he would not have written the poem at all. I should judge it to have been written in one of the most comfortable moods of his life — it is a kind of sketchy intellectual landscape, not a search after truth, nor is it fair to attack him on such a subject; for it is with the critic as with the poet; had Hazlitt thought a little deeper, and been in a good temper, he would never have spied out imaginary faults there. The Sunday before last I asked Haydon to dine with me, when I thought of settling all matters with him in regard to Cripps, and let you know about it. Now, although I engaged him a fortnight before, he sent illness as an excuse. He never will come. I have not been well enough to stand the chance of a wet night, and so have not seen him, nor been able to expurgatorize more masks for you; but I will not speak — your speakers are never doers. Then Reynolds, — every time I see him and mention you, he puts his hand to his head and looks like a son of Niobe's; but he'll write soon. Rome, you know, was not built in a day. I shall be able, by a little perseverance, to read your letters off-hand. I am afraid

## Keats's Letters

your health will suffer from over study before your examination. I think you might regulate the thing according to your own pleasure, — and I would too. They were talking of your being up at Christmas. Will it be before you have passed? There is nothing, my dear Bailey, I should rejoice at more than to see you comfortable with a little Peona wife; an affectionate wife, I have a sort of confidence, would do you a great happiness. May that be one of the many blessings I wish you. Let me be but the one-tenth of one to you, and I shall think it great. My brother George's kindest wishes to you. My dear Bailey, I am,

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

I should not like to be pages in your way; when in a tolerable hungry mood you have no mercy. Your teeth are the Rock Tarpeian down which you capsize epic poems like mad. I would not for forty shillings be Coleridge's "Lays" in your way. I hope you will soon get through this abominable writing in the schools, and be able to keep the terms with more comfort in the hope of retiring to a comfortable and quiet home out of the way of all Hopkinses and black beetles. When you are settled, I will come and take a peep at your church, your house; try whether I shall have grown too lusty for my chair by the fireside, and take a peep at my earliest bower. A question is the best beacon toward a little speculation. Then ask me after my health and spirits. This question ratifies in my mind what I have said above. Health and spirits can only belong unalloyed to the selfish man — the man who thinks much of his fellows can never be in spirits.

You must forgive, although I have only written three hundred lines; they would have been five, but I

## Keats's Letters

have been obliged to go to town. Yesterday I called at Lamb's. St. Jane looked very flush when I first looked in, but was much better before I left.

### XVIII.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Fragment of an outside sheet

[*Postmark*, 5 November, 1817.]

I will speak of something else or my spleen will get higher and higher — and I am a bearer of the two-edged sword. — I hope you will receive an answer from Haydon soon — if not, Pride! Pride! Pride! I have received no more subscription — but shall soon have a full health, Liberty and leisure to give a good part of my time to him. I will certainly be in time for him. We have promised him one year: let that have elapsed, then do as we think proper. If I did not know how impossible it is, I should say — “do not at this time of disappointments, disturb yourself about others.” —

There has been a flaming attack upon Hunt in the *Edinburgh Magazine*. I never read anything so virulent — accusing him of the greatest Crimes, depreciating his Wife, his Poetry, his Habits, his Company, his Conversation. These philippics are to come out in numbers — called “the Cockney School of Poetry.” There has been but one number published — that on Hunt — to which they have prefixed a motto from one Cornelius Webb, Poetaster — who unfortunately was of our party occasionally at Hampstead, and took it into his head to write the following, — something about, “We’ll talk on Words-



## Keats's Letters

worth, Byron, a theme we never tire on ;” and so forth till he comes to Hunt and Keats. In the motto they have put Hunt and Keats in large letters — I have no doubt that the second number was intended for me, but have hopes of its non-appearance, from the following Advertisement in last Sunday’s *Examiner*: — “To Z.—The writer of the article signed Z., in Blackwood’s *Edinburgh Magazine* for October 1817 is invited to send his address to the printer of the *Examiner*, in order that Justice may be Executed on the proper person.” I don’t mind the thing much — but if he should go to such lengths with me as he has done with Hunt, I must infallibly call him to an Account if he be a human being, and appears in Squares and Theatres, where we might “possibly meet” — I don’t relish his abuse.

. . . . .

## XIX.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Leatherhead, 22 November 1817.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — There are two things which tease me here — one of them Cripps, and the other that I cannot go with Tom into Devonshire. However, I hope to do my duty to myself in a week or so; and then I’ll try what I can do for my neighbour — now, is not this virtuous? On returning to Town I’ll damm all Idleness — indeed, in superabundance of employment, I must not be content to run here and there on little two-penny errands, but turn Rakehell, i. e. go a masking, or Bailey will think me just as great a Promise Keeper as *he* thinks you; for myself I do not, and do not remember above one complaint against you for matter o’ that. Bailey



## Keats's Letters

writes so abominable a hand, to give his Letter a fair reading requires a little time: so I had not seen, when I saw you last, his invitation to Oxford at Christmas. I'll go with you. You know how poorly Rice was. I do not think it was all corporeal, — bodily pain was not used to keep him silent. I'll tell you what; he was hurt at what your Sisters said about his joking with your Mother, he was, soothly to sain. It will all blow over. God knows, my dear Reynolds, I should not talk any sorrow to you — you must have enough vexations — so I won't any more. If I ever start a rueful subject in a letter to you — blow me! Why don't you? — Now I am going to ask you a very silly Question neither you nor anybody else could answer, under a folio, or at least a Pamphlet — you shall judge — why don't you, as I do, look unconcerned at what may be called more particularly Heart-vexations? They never surprise me — lord! a man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world.

I like this place very much. There is Hill and Dale and a little River. I went up Box hill this Evening after the Moon — “you a' seen the Moon” — came down, and wrote some lines. Whenever I am separated from you, and not engaged in a continued Poem, every letter shall bring you a lyric — but I am too anxious for you to enjoy the whole to send you a particle. One of the three books I have with me is Shakspeare's Poems: I never found so many beauties in the Sonnets — they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally — in the intensity of working out conceits. Is this to be borne? Hark ye!

“When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
Which erst from heat did canopy the head,  
And Summer's green all girded up in sheaves,  
Borne on the bier with white and bristly head.”

## Keats's Letters

He has left nothing to say about nothing or anything: for look at snails — you know what he says about Snails — you know when he talks about “cockled Snails” — well, in one of these sonnets, he says — the chap slips into — no! I lie! this is in the “Venus and Adonis”: the simile brought it to my Mind.

“As the snail, whose tender horns being hit,  
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain,  
And there all smothered up in shade doth sit,  
Long after fearing to put forth again;  
So at his bloody view her eyes are fled,  
Into the deep dark Cabins of her head.

He overwhelms a genuine Lover of poesy, with all manner of abuse, talking about —

“a poet's rage  
And stretched metre of an antique song.”

Which, by the bye, will be a capital motto for my poem, won't it? He speaks too of “Time's antique pen” — and “April's first-born flowers” — and “Death's eternal cold.”

Now I hope I shall not fall off in the winding up, as the woman said to the round [?] — I mean up and down. I see there is an advertisement in the *Chronicle* to Poets — he is so over-loaded with poems on the “late Princess.” I suppose you do not lack — send me a few — lend me thy hand to laugh a little — send me a little pullet-sperm, a few finch-eggs — and remember me to each of our card-playing Club. When you die you will all be turned into Dice, and be put in pawn with the devil: for cards, they crumple up like any ~~thing~~ king — I mean John in the stage play what pertains Prince Arthur.

I rest

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

Give my love to both houses — *hinc atque illinc*.

## Keats's Letters

### XX.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

[*Postmark*, Leatherhead, 22 November 1817.]

MY DEAR BAILEY : — I will get over the first part of this (*unpaid*) Letter as soon as possible, for it relates to the affairs of poor Cripps. — To a Man of your nature such a Letter as Haydon's must have been extremely cutting. What occasions the greater part of the world's quarrels? Simply this — two Minds meet, and do not understand each other time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party. As soon as I had known Haydon three days, I had got enough of his Character not to have been surprised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with. Nor, when I knew it, was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance; although with you it would have been an imperious feeling. I wish you knew all that I think about Genius and the Heart — and yet I think that you are thoroughly acquainted with my innermost breast in that respect, or you could not have known me even thus long, and still hold me worthy to be your dear Friend. In passing, however, I must say one thing that has pressed upon me lately, and increased my Humility and capability of submission — and that is this truth — Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect — but they have not any individuality, any determined Character — I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self, Men of Power.

But I am running my head into a subject which I am certain I could not do justice to under five Years' study, and 3 vols. octavo — and, moreover, I long to be talking

## Keats's Letters

about the Imagination — so my dear Bailey, do not think of this unpleasant affair, if possible do not — I defy any harm to come of it — I defy. I shall write to Cripps this week, and request him to tell me all his goings-on from time to time by Letter wherever I may be. It will go on well — so don't because you have suddenly discovered a Coldness in Haydon suffer yourself to be teased — Do not, my dear fellow — O! I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination. I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth — whether it existed before or not, — for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty. In a Word, you may know my favourite speculation by my first Book, and the little Song I sent in my last, which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these Matters. The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream, — he awoke and found it truth: — I am more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning — and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his Goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is "a Vision in the form of Youth," a shadow of reality to come — and this consideration has further convinced me, — for it has come as auxiliary to another favourite speculation of mine, — that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation, rather than hunger as you do after Truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to



## Keats's Letters

be a Conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflexion, is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. But, as I was saying, the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness. To compare great things with small, have you never, by being surprised with an old Melody, in a delicious place by a delicious voice, *felt* over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul? do you not remember forming to yourself the Singer's face—more beautiful than it was possible, and yet, with the elevation of the Moment, you did not think so? Even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination, so high that the prototype must be hereafter—that delicious face you will see. What a time! I am continually running away from the subject. Sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex mind—one that is imaginative, and at the same time careful of its fruits,—who would exist partly on Sensation, partly on thought—to whom it is necessary that “years should bring the philosophic Mind”? Such a one I consider yours, and therefore it is necessary to your eternal happiness that you not only drink this old Wine of Heaven, which I shall call the redigestion of our most ethereal Musings upon Earth, but also increase in knowledge, and know all things. I am glad to hear that you are in a fair way for Easter. You will soon get through your unpleasant reading, and then!—but the world is full of troubles, and I have not much reason to think myself pestered with many.

I think Jane or Marianne has a better opinion of me than I deserve; for, really and truly, I do not think my Brother's illness connected with mine—you know more of the real Cause than they do; nor have I any chance of being rack'd as you have been. You perhaps at one time



## Keats's Letters

thought there was such a thing as worldly happiness to be arrived at, at certain periods of time marked out, — you have of necessity from your disposition been thus led away — I scarcely remember counting upon any happiness — I look not for it if it be not in the present hour, — nothing startles me beyond the moment. The Setting Sun will always set me to rights, or if a Sparrow come before my Window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hearing a misfortune having befallen another in this — “ Well, it cannot be helped : he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his Spirit ” — and I beg now, my dear Bailey, that hereafter should you observe anything cold in me not to put it to the account of heartlessness, but abstraction — for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a passion or affection during a whole Week — and so long this sometimes continues, I begin to suspect myself, and the genuineness of my feelings at other times — thinking them a few barren Tragedy Tears.

My brother Tom is much improved — he is going to Devonshire — whither I shall follow him. At present, I am just arrived at Dorking — to change the Scene — change the Air, and give me a spur to wind up my Poem, of which there are wanting 500 lines. I should have been here a day sooner, but the Reynoldses persuaded me to stop in town to meet your friend Christie.<sup>1</sup> There were Rice and Martin — we talked about Ghosts. I will have some Talk with Taylor, and let you know, — when please God I come down at Christmas. I will find the *Examiner* if possible. My best regards to Gleig, my Brothers' to you and Mrs. Bentley.

Your affectionate Friend

JOHN KEATS.

<sup>1</sup> Lockhart's friend — who was drawn into Lockhart's quarrel with John Scott and killed him.

## Keats's Letters

I want to say much more to you — a few hints will set me going. Direct Burford Bridge near Dorking.

### XXI.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Hampstead, 22nd December, 1817.

MY DEAR BROTHERS: — I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this. . . . I saw Kean return to the public in "Richard III.," and finely he did it, and, at the request of Reynolds, I went to criticize his Duke in Rich[ar]d. The critique is in to-day's *Champion*, which I send you, with the *Examiner*, in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsolescence of Christmas Gambols and pastimes: but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost. Hone, the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing, and, as Englishmen, very encouraging: his *Not Guilty* is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning. Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin. Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service. I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke, yesterday and to-day, and am at this moment just come from him, and feel in the humour to go on with this, begun in the morning, and from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells,<sup>1</sup> and went next morning to see "Death on the Pale Horse." It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into

<sup>1</sup> Charles Wells, the author of "Stories after Nature," and "Joseph and His Brethren."

## Keats's Letters

reality. The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine "King Lear," and you will find this exemplified throughout: but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness. The picture is larger than "Christ rejected."

I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, and had a very pleasant day. I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith, and met his two brothers, with Hill and Kingston, and one Du Bois. They only served to convince me how superior humour is to wit, in respect to enjoyment. These men say things which make one start, without making one feel; they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashions; they have all a mannerism in their very eating and drinking, in their mere handling a decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company. "Would I were with that company instead of yours," said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me, and yet I am going to Reynolds on Wednesday. Brown and Dilke walked with me and back to the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute, but a disquisition, with Dilke upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the

## Keats's Letters

sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

Shelley's poem<sup>1</sup> is out, and there are words about its being objected to as much as "Queen Mab" was. Poor Shelley, I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!! Write soon to your most sincere friend and affectionate Brother,

JOHN.

## XXII.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Featherstone Buildings, Monday.

[5 January 1818.]

MY DEAR BROTHERS:—I ought to have written before, and you should have had a long letter last week, but I undertook the *Champion* for Reynolds, who is at Exeter. I wrote two articles, one on the Drury Lane Pantomime, the other on the Covent Garden new Tragedy,<sup>2</sup> which they have not put in. The one they have inserted is so badly punctuated that, you perceive, I am determined never to write more without some care in that particular. Wells tells me that you are licking your chops, Tom, in expectation of my book coming out. I am sorry to say I have not begun my corrections yet: to-morrow I set out. I called on Sawrey this morning. He did not seem to be at all out at anything I said and the inquiries I made with regard to your spitting of blood, and moreover desired me to ask you to send him a correct account of all your sensations and symptoms concerning

<sup>1</sup> "Laon and Cythna."

<sup>2</sup> See Postscript. The tragedy was "Retribution, or the Chieftain's Daughter,"—the pantomime "Don Giovanni."



## Keats's Letters

the palpitation and the spitting and the cough—if you have any. Your last letter gave me a great pleasure, for I think the invalid is in a better spirit there along the Edge; and as for George, I must immediately, now I think of it, correct a little misconception of a part of my last letter. The Miss Reynolds have never said one word against me about you, or by any means endeavoured to lessen you in my estimation. That is not what I referred to; but the manner and thoughts which I knew they internally had towards you, time will show. Wells and Severn dined with me yesterday. We had a very pleasant day. I pitched upon another bottle of claret. We enjoyed ourselves very much; were all very witty and full of rhyme. We played a concert<sup>1</sup> from 4 o'clock till 10—drank your healths, the Hunts', and *N. B. Severn*, Peter Pindar's. I said on that day the only good thing I was ever guilty of. We were talking about Stephens and the 1s. [?] Gallery. I said I wondered that careful folks would go there, for although it was but a shilling, still you had to pay through the Nose. I saw the Peachey family in a box at Drury one night. I have got such a curious,<sup>2</sup> or rather I had such, now I am in my own hand.

I have had a great deal of pleasant time with Rice lately, and am getting initiated into a little band. They call drinking deep dyin' scarlet. They call good wine a pretty tippie, and call getting a child knocking out an apple; stopping at a tavern they call hanging out. Where do you sup? is where do you hang out?

Thursday I promised to dine with Wordsworth, and the weather is so bad that I am undecided, for he lives at Mortimer street. I had an invitation to meet him at

<sup>1</sup> Each one, that is to say, imitated vocally some musical instrument, according to a custom in which Keats and his brothers and intimates indulged.

<sup>2</sup> A word seems to have been omitted here.



## Keats's Letters

Kingston's, but not liking that place I sent my excuse. What I think of doing to-day is to dine in Mortimer street (Words<sup>th</sup>), and sup here in the Feath<sup>s</sup> buildings, as Mr. Wells has invited me. On Saturday, I called on Wordsworth before he went to Kingston's, and was surprised to find him with a stiff collar. I saw his spouse, and I think his daughter. I forget whether I had written my last before my Sunday evening at Haydon's — no, I did not, or I should have told you, Tom, of a young man you met at Paris, at Scott's, of the [name of] Ritchie.<sup>1</sup> I think he is going to Fezan, in Africa; then to proceed if possible like Mungo Park. He was very polite to me, and inquired very particularly after you. Then there was Wordsworth, Lamb, Monkhouse, Landseer, Kingston, and your humble servant. Lamb got tipsy and blew up Kingston — proceeding so far as to take the candle across the room, hold it to his face, and show us what a soft fellow he was.

I astonished Kingston at supper with a pertinacity in favour of drinking, keeping my two glasses at work in a knowing way. He sent me a hare last week, which I sent to Mrs. Dilke. Brown is not come back. I and Dilke are getting capital friends. He is going to take the *Champion*. He has sent his farce to Covent Garden. I met Bob Harris on the steps at Covent Garden; we had a good deal of curious chat. He came out with his old humble opinion. The Covent Garden pantomime is a very nice one, but they have a middling Harlequin, a bad Pantaloon, a worse Clown, and a shocking Columbine, who is one of the Miss Dennets.

I suppose you will see my critique on the new tragedy in the next week's *Champion*. It is a shocking bad

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ritchie, who started on his proposed journey, and died in Africa, wrote a charming poetical Farewell to England, printed by Alaric Watts in his "Poetical Album."

## Keats's Letters

one. I have not seen Hunt; he was out when I called. Mrs. Hunt looks as well as ever I saw her after her confinement. There is an article in the sennight *Examiner* on Godwin's "Mandeville," signed E. K. I think it Miss Kent's.<sup>1</sup> I will send it. There are fine subscriptions going on for Hone.

You ask me what degrees there are between Scott's novels and those of Smollet. They appear to me to be quite distinct in every particular, more especially in their aim. Scott endeavours to throw so interesting and romantic a colouring into common and low characters as to give them a touch of the sublime. Smollet, on the contrary, pulls down and levels what with other men would continue romance. The grand parts of Scott are within the reach of more minds than the finest humours in "Humphrey Clinker." I forget whether that fine thing of the Sargeant is Fielding's or Smollet's, but it gives me more pleasure than the whole novel of "The Antiquary." You must remember what I mean.<sup>2</sup> Some one says to the Sargeant: "That's a non-sequiter!" "If you come to that," replies the Sargeant, "you're another!"

I see by Wells' letter Mr. Abbey does not overstock you with money. You must write. I have not seen [word said to be illegible] yet, but expect it on Wednesday. I am afraid it is gone. Severn tells me he has an order for some drawings for the Emperor of Russia.

I was at a dance at Redhall's, and passed a pleasant time enough — drank deep, and won 10.6 at cutting for half guineas. There was a younger brother of the Squibes made himself very conspicuous after the ladies had retired from the supper table by giving Mater [word illegible]. Mr. Redhall said he did not understand any thing but plain

<sup>1</sup> It was not by Miss Bessy Kent (Hunt's sister-in-law) but by Shelley, "E. K." standing for "Elfin Knight."

<sup>2</sup> "Tom Jones," Book ix., Chapter 6.

## Keats's Letters

English, whereat Rice egged the young fool to say the word plainly out, after which there was an enquiry as to the derivation of the word . . . while two parsons and grammarians were sitting together and settling the matter, Wm. Squibes interrupting said a very good thing, Gentlemen, says he, I have always understood it to be a root and not a derivative. . . .

Bailey was there and seemed to enjoy the evening. Rice said he cared less about the hour than any one; and the proof is his dancing — he cares not for time, dancing as if he was deaf. Old Redhall not being used to give parties, had no idea of the quantity of wine that would be drank, and he actually put in readiness on the kitchen stairs eight dozen.

Every one inquires after you, and every one desires their remembrances to you. I have seen Fanny twice lately — she inquired particularly after you and wants a co-partnership letter from you. She has been unwell, but is improving — I think she will be quick well. Mrs. Abbey was saying that the Keatses were ever indolent, that they would ever be so, and that it is born in them. Well, whispered Fanny to me, if it is born with us, how can we help it. She seems very anxious for a letter. As I asked her what I should get for her, she said a "Medal of the Princess."<sup>1</sup> I called on Haslam — we dined very well. You must get well, Tom, and then I shall feel whole and genial as the winter air. Give me as many letters as you like, and write to Sawrey soon. I received a short letter from Bailey about Cripps, and one from Haydon, ditto. Haydon thinks he improved very much. Mrs. Wells' desires particularly to Tom and her respects to George, and I desire no better than to be ever your most affectionate brother,

JOHN.

<sup>1</sup> Princess Charlotte died on the 6th of November, 1817.

## Keats's Letters

P. S. I had not opened the *Champion* before. I found both my articles in it.

### XXIII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Saturday morning

[*Postmark*, 10 January 1818.]

MY DEAR TAYLOR:—Several things have kept me from you lately:—first you had got into a little hell, which I was not anxious to reconnoitre—secondly, I have made a vow not to call again without my first book: so you may expect to see me in four days. Thirdly, I have been racketing too much, and do not feel over well. I have seen Wordsworth frequently—Dined with him last Monday—Reynolds, I suppose you have seen. Just scribble me thus many lines to let me know you are in the land of the living, and well. Remember me to the Fleet Street Household—and should you see any from Percy Street, give my kindest regards to them.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

### XXIV.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Saturday Morn

[*Postmark*, Hampstead 10 January 1818.]

MY DEAR HAYDON:—I should have seen you ere this, but on account of my sister being in Town: so that when I have sometimes made ten paces towards you, Fanny has called me into the City; and the Christmas Holydays are



## Keats's Letters

your only time to see Sisters, that is if they are so situated as mine. I will be with you early next week — to-night it should be, but we have a sort of a Club every Saturday evening — to-morrow, but I have on that day an insuperable engagement. Cripps has been down to me, and appears sensible that a binding to you would be of the greatest advantage to him — if such a thing be done it cannot be before £150 or £200 are secured in subscriptions to him. I will write to Bailey about it, give a Copy of the Subscribers' names to every one I know who is likely to get a £5 for him. I will leave a Copy at Taylor and Hessey's, Rodwell and Martin, and will ask Kingston and Co. to cash up.

Your friendship for me is now getting into its teens — and I feel the past. Also every day older I get — the greater is my idea of your achievements in Art: and I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age — The Excursion, Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste.

Yours affectionately

JOHN KEATS —

### XXV.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Friday, 23 January 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY: — Twelve days have pass'd since your last reached me. — What has gone through the myriads of human minds since the 12th? We talk of the immense Number of Books, the Volumes ranged thousands by thousands — but perhaps more goes through the human intelligence in Twelve days than ever was written. — *How has that unfortunate family lived through*



## Keats's Letters

*the twelve?* One saying of yours I shall never forget — you may not recollect it — it being perhaps said when you were looking on the Surface and seeming of Humanity alone, without a thought of the past or the future — or the deeps of good and evil — you were at that moment estranged from speculation, and I think you have arguments ready for the Man who would utter it to you — this is a formidable preface for a simple thing — merely you said, “Why should woman suffer?” Aye, why should she? “By heavens, I’d coin my very soul, and drop my Blood for Drachmas!” These things are, and he, who feels how incompetent the most skyeey Knight-errantry is to heal this bruised fairness, is like a sensitive leaf on the hot hand of thought. — Your tearing, my dear friend, a spiritless and gloomy letter up, to re-write to me, is what I shall never forget — it was to me a real thing. Things have happened lately of great perplexity — you must have heard of them — Reynolds and Haydon retorting and recriminating, and parting for ever — the same thing has happened between Haydon and Hunt. It is unfortunate — Men should bear with each other: there lives not the Man who may not be cut up, aye Lashed to pieces on his weakest side. The best of men have but a portion of good in them — a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames, which creates the ferment of existence — by which a Man is propelled to act, and strive, and buffet with Circumstance. The sure way, Bailey, is first to know a Man’s faults, and then be passive — if after that he insensibly draws you towards him then you have no power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either Reynolds or Haydon, I was well read in their faults; yet, knowing them, I have been cementing gradually with both. I have an affection for them both, for reasons almost opposite — and to both must I of necessity cling, supported always by the hope that, when a

## Keats's Letters

little time, a few years, shall have tried me more fully in their esteem, I may be able to bring them together. The time must come, because they have both hearts: and they will recollect the best parts of each other, when this gust is overblown. — I had a message from you through a letter to Jane<sup>1</sup> — I think, about Cripps — there can be no idea of binding until a sufficient sum is sure for him — and even then the thing should be maturely considered by all his helpers — I shall try my luck upon as many fat purses as I can meet with. — Cripps is improving very fast: I have the greater hopes of him because he is so slow in development. A Man of great executing powers at twenty, with a look and a speech almost stupid, is sure to do something.

I have just looked through the second side of your Letter, — I feel a great content at it. — I was at Hunt's the other day, and he surprised me with a real authenticated lock of *Milton's Hair*. I know you would like what I wrote thereon.

This I did at Hunt's, at his request — perhaps I should have done something better alone and at home. — I have sent my first Book<sup>2</sup> to the press, and this afternoon shall begin preparing the second. My visit to you will be a great spur to quicken the proceeding. I have not had your Sermon returned — I long to make it the subject of a letter to you — What do they say at Oxford?

I trust you and Gleig pass much fine time together. Remember me to him and Whitehead. My brother Tom is getting stronger, but his spitting of Blood continues. I sat down to read "King Lear" yesterday, and felt the greatness of the thing up to the Writing of a Sonnet preparatory thereto: in my next you shall have it. There were some miserable reports of Rice's health — I went, and lo! Master Jemmy had been to the play the night

<sup>1</sup> Jane Reynolds.    <sup>2</sup> Of "Endymion."

## Keats's Letters

before, and was out at the time — he always comes on his legs like a Cat. I have seen a good deal of Wordsworth. Hazlitt is lecturing on Poetry at the Surrey Institution — I shall be there next Tuesday.

Your most affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS.

### XXVI.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Friday, 23 January 1818.

MY DEAR BROTHERS: — I was thinking what hindered me from writing so long, for I have so many things to say to you, and know not where to begin. It shall be upon a thing most interesting to you, my Poem. Well! I have given the first Book to Taylor; he seemed more than satisfied with it, and to my surprise proposed publishing it in Quarto, if Haydon could make a drawing of some event therein, for a Frontispiece. I called on Haydon, he said he would do anything I liked, but said he would rather paint a finished picture, from it, which he seems eager to do; this in a year or two will be a glorious thing for us; and it will be, for Haydon is struck with the 1st Book. I left Haydon and the next day received a letter from him, proposing to make, as he says, with all his might, a finished chalk sketch of my head, to be engraved in the first style and put at the head of my Poem, saying at the same time he had never done the thing for any human being, and that it must have considerable effect as he will put his name to it. I begin to-day to copy my 2nd Book — “thus far into the bowels of the land.” You shall hear whether it will be Quarto or non Quarto, picture or non picture. Leigh Hunt I showed my 1st Book to —

## Keats's Letters

he allows it not much merit as a whole; says it is unnatural and made ten objections to it in the mere skimming over. He says the conversation is unnatural and too high-flown for Brother and Sister — says it should be simple, forgetting do ye mind that they are both over-shadowed by a supernatural Power, and of force could not speak like Francesca in the "Rimini." He must first prove that Caliban's poetry is unnatural. This with me completely overturns his objections. The fact is he and Shelley are hurt, and perhaps justly, at my not having showed them the affair officiously; and from several hints I have had they appear much disposed to dissect and anatomize any trip or slip I may have made. — But who's afraid? Aye! Tom! Demme if I am. I went last Tuesday, an hour too late, to Hazlitt's Lecture on Poetry, got there just as they were coming out, when all these pounced upon me — Hazlitt, John Hunt and Son, Wells, Bewick, all the Landseers, Bob Harris, aye and more — the Landseers enquired after you particularly — I know not whether Wordsworth has left town — But Sunday I dined with Hazlitt and Haydon, also that I took Haslam with me — I dined with Brown lately. Dilke having taken the *Champion* Theatricals was obliged to be in town. Fanny has returned to Walthamstow. Mr. Abbey appeared very glum the last time I went to see her, and said in an indirect way that I had no business to be there — Rice has been ill, but has been mending much lately.

I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately — I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time have been addicted to passiveness. Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers. As an instance of this — observe — I sat down yesterday to read "King Lear" once again: the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a sonnet, I wrote it.



## Keats's Letters

So you see I am getting at it, with a sort of determination and strength, though verily I do not feel it at this moment — this is my fourth letter this morning, and I feel rather tired, and my head rather swimming — so I will leave it open till to-morrow's post. —

I am in the habit of taking my papers to Dilke's and copying there; so I chat and proceed at the same time. I have been there at my work this evening, and the walk over the Heath takes off all sleep, so I will even proceed with you. I left off short in my last just as, I began an account of a private theatrical — Well it was of the lowest order, all greasy and oily, insomuch that if they had lived in olden times, when signs were hung over the doors, the only appropriate one for that oily place would have been — a guttered Candle. They played "John Bull," "The Review," and it was to conclude with "Bombastes Furioso" — I saw from a Box the 1<sup>st</sup> Act of "John Bull," then went to Drury and did not return till it was over — when by Wells's interest we got behind the scenes — there was not a yard wide all the way round for actors, scene-shifters and interlopers to move in — for "Nota Bene" the Green Room was under the stage, and there was I threatened over and over again to be turned out by the oily scene-shifters. There did I hear a little painted Trollop own, very candidly, that she had failed in Mary, with a "damned if she'd play a serious part again, as long as she lived," and at the same time she was habited as the Quaker in the "Review." — There was a quarrel, and a fat good-natured looking girl in soldiers' clothes wished she had only been a man for Tom's sake. One fellow began a song, but an unlucky finger-point from the Gallery sent him off like a shot. One chap was dressed to kill for the King in "Bombastes," and he stood at the edge of the scene in the very sweat of anxiety to show himself, but alas

## Keats's Letters

the thing was not played. The sweetest morsel of the night moreover was, that the musicians began pegging and fagging away — at an overture — never did you see faces more in earnest, three times did they play it over, dropping all kinds of correctness and still did not the curtain go up. Well then they went into a country-dance, then into a region they well knew, into the old boonsome Pot-house, and then to see how pompous o' the sudden they turned; how they looked about and chatted; how they did not care a damn; was a great treat.

I hope I have not tired you by this filling up of the dash in my last. Constable, the bookseller, has offered Reynolds ten guineas a sheet to write for his Magazine — it is an Edinburgh one, which *Blackwood's* started up in opposition to. Hunt said he was nearly sure that the "Cockney School" was written by Scott<sup>1</sup> so you are right, Tom! — There are no more little bits of news I can remember at present.

I remain,

My dear Brothers, your very affectionate brother

JOHN.

## XXVII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

[*Postmark*, Hampstead, 30 January 1818.]

MY DEAR TAYLOR: — These lines as they now stand about "happiness," have rung in my ears like "a chime a mending" — See here,

"Behold

Wherein lies happiness, Peona? fold, &c."

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dilke stated that it was written by Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law.

## Keats's Letters

It appears to me the very contrary of blessed. I hope this will appear to you more eligible.

“Wherein lies happiness? In that which beckons  
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
A fellowship with Essence till we shine  
Full alchemized, and free of space — Behold  
The clear religion of Heaven — fold, &c.”

You must indulge me by putting this in, for setting aside the badness of the other, such a preface is necessary to the subject. The whole thing must, I think, have appeared to you, who are a consecutive man, as a thing almost of mere words, but I assure you that, when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth. My having written that argument will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of anything I ever did. It set before me the gradations of happiness, even like a kind of pleasure thermometer, and is my first step towards the chief attempt in the drama. The playing of different natures with joy and Sorrow.

Do me this favour, and believe me,  
Your sincere friend,  
J. KEATS.

I hope your next work will be of a more general Interest. I suppose you cogitate a little about it now and then.

## XXVIII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Hampstead, Saturday [31 January 1818]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — I have parcell'd out this day for Letter Writing — more resolved thereon because your

## Keats's Letters

Letter will come as a refreshment and will have (sic parvis &c.) the same effect as a Kiss in certain situations where people become over-generous. I have read this first sentence over, and think it savours rather; however an inward innocence is like a nested dove.<sup>1</sup>

I must take a turn, and then write to Teignmouth. Remember me to all, not excepting yourself.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

### XXIX.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Hampstead, Tuesday [3 February 1818].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — I thank you for your dish of Filberts — would I could get a basket of them by way of dessert every day for the sum of twopence.<sup>2</sup> Would we were a sort of ethereal Pigs, and turned loose to feed upon spiritual Mast and Acorns — which would be merely being a squirrel and feeding upon filberts, for what is a squirrel but an airy pig, or a filbert but a sort of archangelical acorn? About the nuts being worth cracking, all I can say is, that where there are a throng of delightful Images ready drawn, simplicity is the only thing. The first is the best on account of the first line, and the “arrow, foil’d of its antler’d food,” and moreover (and this is the only word or two I find fault with, the more because I have had so much reason to shun it as a quicksand) the last has “tender and true.” We must cut this, and not be rattlesnaked into any more of the like. It may be said

<sup>1</sup> See “O blush not so.”

<sup>2</sup> Two sonnets on Robin Hood, sent by the “twopenny post,” — printed in *The Yellow Dwarf* in 1818, and in *The Garden of Florence* (1821).



## Keats's Letters

that we ought to read our contemporaries, that Wordsworth &c. should have their due from us. But, for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. Sancho will invent a Journey heavenward as well as anybody. We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway, crying out, "Admire me, I am a violet! Dote upon me, I am a primrose!" Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this: each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state, and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions, and has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured. The ancients were Emperors of vast Provinces, they had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them. I will cut all this — I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular. Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh, when we can wander with Esau? Why should we kick against the Pricks, when we can walk on Roses? Why should we be owls, when we can be eagles? Why be teased with "nice-eyed wagtails," when we have in sight "the Cherub Contemplation"? Why with Wordsworth's "Matthew with a bough of wilding in his hand," when we can have Jacques "under an oak," &c.? The secret of the Bough

## Keats's Letters

of Wilding will run through your head faster than I can write it. Old Matthew spoke to him some years ago on some nothing, and because he happens in an Evening Walk to imagine the figure of the old Man, he must stamp it down in black and white, and it is henceforth sacred. I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets and Robin Hood. Your letter and its sonnets gave me more pleasure than will the Fourth Book of "Childe Harold" and the whole of anybody's life and opinions. In return for your dish of filberts, I have gathered a few catkins.<sup>1</sup> I hope they'll look pretty.

I hope you will like them — they are at least written in the spirit of outlawry.

I will call on you at 4 to-morrow and we will trudge together for it is not the thing to be a stranger in the Land of Harpsicols. I hope also to bring you my 2<sup>d</sup> Book.<sup>2</sup> In the hope that these scribblings will be some amusement for you this evening, I remain, copying on the Hill,

Your sincere friend and Co-scribbler,

JOHN KEATS.

XXX.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Hampstead, 16 February [1818].

MY DEAR BROTHERS: — When once a man delays a letter beyond the proper time, he delays it longer, for one

<sup>1</sup> "To J. H. R. in Answer to his Robin Hood Sonnets."

<sup>2</sup> Of "Endymion."

## Keats's Letters

or two reasons — first, because he must begin in a very common-place style, that is to say, with an excuse; and secondly things and circumstances become so jumbled in his mind, that he knows not what, or what not, he has said in his last. I shall visit you as soon as I have copied my Poem all out. I am now much beforehand with the printers: they have done none yet, and I am half afraid they will let half the season by before the printing. I am determined they shall not trouble me when I have copied it all. Horace Smith has lent me his manuscript called “Nehemiah Muggs, an exposure of the Methodists” — perhaps I may send you a few extracts. Hazlitt’s last lecture was on Thomson, Cowper, and Crabbe. He praised Thomson and Cowper, but he gave Crabbe an unmerciful licking. I think Hunt’s article of Fazio — no it was not, but I saw Fazio the first night, it hung rather heavily on me. I am in the high way of being introduced to a squad of people, Peter Pindar, Mrs. Opie, Mrs. Scott — Mr. Robinson, a great friend of Coleridge’s, called on me. Richards tells me that my Poems are known in the west country, and that he saw a very clever copy of verses, headed with a Motto from my Sonnet to George — Honors rush so thickly upon me that I shall not be able to bear up against them. What think you — am I to be crowned in the Capitol, am I to be made a Mandarin — No! I am to be invited, Mrs. Hunt tells me, to a party at Ollier’s, to keep Shakespeare’s birthday — Shakespeare would stare to see me there. The Wednesday before last Shelley, Hunt and I wrote each a Sonnet on the River Nile, some day you shall read them all. I saw a sheet of “Endymion,” and have all reason to suppose they will soon get it done, there shall be nothing wanting on my part. I have been writing at intervals many songs and Sonnets, and I long to be at Teignmouth to read them over to you; however I think I

## Keats's Letters

had better wait till this Book is off my mind ; it will not be long first.

Reynolds has been writing two very capital articles, in the *Yellow Dwarf*, on Popular Preachers. All the talk here is about Dr. Croft, the Duke of Devon etc.

Your most affectionate brother

JOHN

### XXXI.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

[*Postmark*, Hampstead, 19 February 1818.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—I had an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner—let him on a certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale—but when will it do so? Never. When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all “the two-and-thirty Palaces.” How happy is such a voyage of conception, what delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon Clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings—the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle-age a strength to beat them—a strain of music conducts to “an odd angle of the Isle,” and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth. Nor will this sparing touch of noble Books be any irreverence to their Writers—for perhaps the honours paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the Benefit done by great Works to the “Spirit and pulse” of good by their mere passive existence. Memory should not be called Knowledge. Many have



## Keats's Letters

original minds who do not think it — they are led away by Custom. Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel — the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul, and weave a tapestry empyrean full of symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering, of distinctness for his luxury. But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions. It is however quite the contrary. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end. An old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his path and the child left thinking. Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal every human<sup>1</sup> might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees! It has been an old comparison for our urging on — the Beehive; however, it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee — for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving — no, the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The flower, I doubt not, receives a fair guerdon from the Bee — its leaves blush deeper in the next spring — and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it

<sup>1</sup> Keats may have used this adjective as a noun; or he may have left out the word *being* accidentally.

## Keats's Letters

is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury — let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be aimed at; but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive — budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit — sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink. I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness — I have not read any Books — the Morning said I was right — I had no idea but of the morning, and the thrush said I was right.

Now I am sensible all this is a mere sophistication (however it may neighbour to any truths), to excuse my own indolence — so I will not deceive myself that Man should be equal with Jove — but think himself very well off as a sort of Scullion-Mercury, or even a humble Bee. It is no matter whether I am right or wrong, either one way or another, if there is sufficient to lift a little time from your shoulders.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS —

### XXXII.

TO GEORGE AND THOMAS KEATS

Hampstead,

Saturday [21 February 1818].

MY DEAR BROTHERS: — I am extremely sorry to have given you so much uneasiness by not writing; however, you know good news is no news or vice versâ. I do not like to write a short letter to you, or you would have had one

## Keats's Letters

long before. The weather although boisterous to-day has been very much milder; and I think Devonshire is not the last place to receive a temperate Change. I have been abominably idle since you left, but have just turned over a new leaf, and used as a marker a letter of excuse to an invitation from Horace Smith. The occasion of my writing to-day is the enclosed letter — by Postmark from Miss W[ylie]. Does she expect you in town George? I received a letter the other day from Haydon, in which he says, his *Essays on the Elgin Marbles* are being translated into Italian, the which he superintends. I did not mention that I had seen the *British Gallery*; there are some nice things by Stark, and “*Bathsheba*” by Wilkie, which is condemned. I could not bear Alston’s “*Uriel*.”

Reynolds has been very ill for some time, confined to the house, and had leeches applied to his chest; when I saw him on Wednesday he was much the same, and he is in the worst place for amendment, among the strife of women’s tongues, in a hot and parch’d room: I wish he would move to Butler’s for a short time. The Thrushes and Blackbirds have been singing me into an idea that it was Spring, and almost that leaves were on the trees. So that black clouds and boisterous winds seem to have mustered and collected in full Divan, for the purpose of convincing me to the contrary. Taylor says my poem shall be out in a month, I think he will be out before it. . . .

The thrushes are singing now as if they would speak to the winds, because their big brother Jack — the Spring — was not far off. I am reading Voltaire and Gibbon, although I wrote to Reynolds the other day to prove reading of no use; I have not seen Hunt since. I am a good deal with Dilke and Brown; we are very thick; they are very kind to me, they are well; I don’t think I could stop in Hampstead but for their neighbourhood.

## Keats's Letters

I hear Hazlitt's lectures regularly, his last was on Gray, Collins, Young, &c., and he gave a very fine piece of discriminating Criticism on Swift, Voltaire, and Rabelais. I was very disappointed at his treatment of Chatterton. I generally meet with many I know there. Lord Byron's 4th Canto is expected out, and I heard somewhere, that Walter Scott has a new Poem in readiness. I am sorry that Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in town by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry. Yet he is a great poet if not a philosopher. I have not yet read Shelley's Poem, I do not suppose you have it yet, at the Teignmouth libraries. These double letters must come rather heavy, I hope you have a moderate portion of cash, but don't fret at all, if you have not — Lord! I intend to play at cut and run as well as Falstaff, that is to say, before he got so lusty.

I remain praying for your health my dear Brothers

Your most affectionate Brother

JOHN.

### XXXIII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Hampstead, 27 February [1818].

MY DEAR TAYLOR:—Your alteration strikes me as being a great improvement. And now I will attend to the punctuations you speak of. The comma should be at *soberly*, and in the other passage the comma should follow *quiet*. I am extremely indebted to you for this alteration, and also for your after admonitions. It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome prejudices in reading my verses—that affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular passage. In “Endym-



## Keats's Letters

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ion," I have most likely but moved into the go-cart from the leading-strings. In poetry I have a few axioms, and you will see how far I am from their centre.

1st. I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

2nd. Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what poetry should be, than to write it. And this leads me to

Another axiom — That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. — However it may be with me, I cannot help looking into new countries with "O for a muse of Fire to ascend!" If "Endymion" serves me as a pioneer, perhaps I ought to be content — I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read, and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths; and I have I am sure many friends, who, if I fail, will attribute any change in my life and temper to humbleness rather than pride — to a cowering under the wings of great poets, rather than to a bitterness that I am not appreciated. I am anxious to get "Endymion" printed that I may forget it and proceed. I have copied the 3rd Book and begun the 4th. On running my eye over the proofs, I saw one mistake — I will notice it presently, and also any others, if there be any. There should be no comma in "the raft branch down sweeping from a tall ash-top." I have besides made one or two alterations and also altered the 13<sup>th</sup> line p. 32 to make sense of it, as you will see. I will take care the printer shall not trip up my heels. There should be no dash

## Keats's Letters

after Dryope, in the line "Dryope's lone lulling of her child."

Remember me to Percy Street.

Your sincere and obliged friend

JOHN KEATS

P. S. — You shall have a short preface in good time.

### XXXIV.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Teignmouth, Saturday [14 March 1818].

DEAR REYNOLDS: — I escaped being blown over and blown under and trees and house being toppled on me. — I have, since hearing of Brown's accident had an aversion to a dose of parapet, and being also a lover of antiquities I would sooner have a harmless piece of Herculaneum sent me quietly as a present than ever so modern a chimney-pot tumbled on to my head. Being agog to see some Devonshire, I would have taken a walk the first day, but the rain would not let me; and the second, but the rain would not let me; and the third, but the rain forbade it. Ditto 4 — ditto 5 — ditto — so I made up my Mind to stop in-doors, and catch a sight flying between the showers: and, behold I saw a pretty valley — pretty cliffs, pretty Brooks, pretty Meadows, pretty trees, both standing as they were created, and blown down as they are uncreated. The green is beautiful, as they say, and pity it is that it is amphibious — *mais*! but alas! the flowers here wait as naturally for the rain twice a day as the Muscels do for the Tide; so we look upon a brook in these parts as you look upon a splash in your Country. There must be something to support this — aye, fog, hail, snow,

## Keats's Letters

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rain, Mist blanketing up three parts of the year. This Devonshire is like Lydia Languish, very entertaining when it smiles, but cursedly subject to sympathetic moisture. You have the sensation of walking under one great Lamp-lighter: and you can't go on the other side of the ladder to keep your frock clean, and cosset your superstition. Buy a girdle — put a pebble in your mouth — loosen your braces — for I am going among scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe — I'll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous-sound you, and solitude you. I'll make a lodgment on your glaxis by a row of Pines, and storm your covered way with bramble Bushes. I'll have at you with hip and haw small-shot, and cannonade you with Shingles — I'll be witty upon salt-fish,<sup>1</sup> and impede your cavalry with clotted cream. But ah Coward! to talk at this rate to a sick man, or, I hope, to one that was sick — for I hope by this you stand on your right foot. If you are not — that's all, — I intend to cut all sick people if they do not make up their minds to cut Sickness — a fellow to whom I have a complete aversion, and who strange to say is harboured and countenanced in several houses where I visit — he is sitting now quite impudent between me and Tom — he insults me at poor Jem Rice's — and you have seated him before now between us at the Theatre, when I thought he looked with a longing eye at poor Kean. I shall say, once for all, to my friends, generally and severally, cut that fellow, or I cut you.

I went to the Theatre here the other night, which I forgot to tell George, and got insulted, which I ought to remember to forget to tell any Body; for I did not fight, and as yet have had no redress — “Lie thou there, sweet-

<sup>1</sup> Teignmouth used to have a considerable trade in dried cod from Newfoundland — called locally “salt fish.”

## Keats's Letters

heart!" I wrote to Bailey yesterday, obliged to speak in a high way, and a damme who's afraid — for I had owed him so long; however, he shall see I will be better in future. Is he in town yet? I have directed to Oxford as the better chance. I have copied my Fourth Book, and shall write the Preface soon. I wish it was all done; for I want to forget it, and make my mind free for something new. Atkins the coachman, Bartlett the surgeon, Simmons<sup>1</sup> the Barber, and the Girls over at the Bonnet-shop, say we shall now have a month of seasonable weather — warm, witty, and full of invention. Write to me and tell me that you are well or thereabouts, or by the holy Beau-cœur, which I suppose is the Virgin Mary, or the repented Magdalen (beautiful name, that Magdalen), I'll take to my Wings and fly away to anywhere but old or Nova Scotia. I wish I had a little innocent bit of Metaphysic in my head, to criss-cross the letter: but you know a favourite tune is hardest to be remembered when one wants it most and you, I know, have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without associating you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature, and you know enough of me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after having read this, you will find it a long letter, and see written in the Air before you,

Your most affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS.

Remember me to all. Tom's remembrances to you.

<sup>1</sup> Probably these are all the names of real inhabitants. Mr. Bartlett, at all events, I well remember as the senior medical practitioner of the place in 1850 and onwards.



## Keats's Letters

### XXXV.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Teignmouth, Saturday Morn.

[*Postmark*, 23 March 1818.]

MY DEAR HAYDON: — In sooth, I hope you are not too sanguine about that seal <sup>1</sup> — in sooth I hope it is not Brumidgeum — in double sooth I hope it is his — and in triple sooth I hope I shall have an impression. Such a piece of intelligence came doubly welcome to me while in your own County and in your own hand — not but I have blown up the said County for its urinal qualifications — the first six days I was here it did nothing but rain; and at that time having to write to a friend I gave Devonshire a good blowing up — it has been fine for almost three days, and I was coming round a bit; but to day it rains again — with me the County is yet upon its good behaviour. I have enjoyed the most delightful Walks these three fine days beautiful enough to make me content here all the summer could I stay.

Here's some dogrel for you — Perhaps you would like a bit of B——hrell:

Where be ye going, you Devon Maid?  
And what have ye there in the Basket?  
Ye tight little fairy just fresh from the dairy,  
Will ye give me some cream if I ask it?

I love your Meads, and I love your flowers,  
And I love your junkets mainly,  
But 'hind the door I love kissing more,  
O look not so disdainly.

<sup>1</sup> A seal found in a field at Stratford-upon-Avon, and thought by Haydon to have belonged to Shakespeare.

## Keats's Letters

I love your hills, and I love your dales,  
And I love your flocks a-bleating —  
But O, on the heather to lie together,  
With both our hearts a-beating !

I'll put your Basket all safe in a nook,  
Your shawl I hang up on the willow,  
And we will sigh in the daisy's eye  
And kiss on a grass green pillow.

I know not of this rhyming fit has done anything — it will be safe with you if worthy to put among my Lyrics.

How does the work go on? I should like to bring out my *Dentatus*<sup>1</sup> at the time your *Epic* makes its appearance. I expect to have my Mind soon clear for something new. Tom has been much worse: but is now getting better — his remembrances to you. I think of seeing the Dart and Plymouth — but I don't know. It has as yet been a Mystery to me how and where Wordsworth went. I can't help thinking he has returned to his Shell — with his beautiful Wife and his enchanting Sister. It is a great Pity that People should by associating themselves with the finest things, spoil them. Hunt has damned Hampstead a[nd] masks and sonnets and Italian tales. Wordsworth has damned the lakes — Milman has damned the old drama — West has damned — wholesale. Peacock has damned satire — Ollier has damn'd Music — Hazlitt has damned the bigoted and the blue-stockinged; how durst the Man?! he is your only good damner, and if ever I am damn'd — damn me if I shouldn't like him to damn me. It will not be long ere I see you, but I thought I would just give you a line out of Devon.

Yours affectionately

JOHN KEATS

Remember me to all we know.

<sup>1</sup> A picture by Haydon.

## Keats's Letters

### XXXVI.

TO JAMES RICE

Teignmouth Tuesday [24 March 1818].

MY DEAR RICE: — Being in the midst of your favourite Devon, I should not, by rights, pen one word but it should contain a vast portion of Wit, Wisdom and learning — for I have heard that Milton ere he wrote his answer to Salmasius came into these parts, and for one whole month, rolled himself for three whole hours a day, in a certain meadow hard by us — where the mark of his nose at equidistances is still shown. The exhibitor of the said meadow further saith, that, after these rollings, not a nettle sprang up in all the seven acres for seven years, and that from the said time a new sort of plant was made from the white thorn of a thornless nature, very much used by the bucks of the present day to rap their boots withal. This account made me very naturally suppose that the nettles and thorns etherealized by the scholar's rotatory motion, and garnered in his head, thence flew, after a process of fermentation, against the luckless Salmasius, and occasioned his well-known and unhappy end. What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thoughts and make our minds up on any matter in five minutes, and remain content, that is, build a sort of mental cottage of feelings, quiet and pleasant — to have a sort of philosophical back-garden, and cheerful holiday-keeping front one. But, alas! this never can be; for, as the material cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy, and the Andes, and burning mountains, so the spiritual cottager has knowledge of the terra semi-incognita of things unearthly, and cannot for his life keep in the check-rein — or I should stop here,

## Keats's Letters

quiet and comfortable in my theory of — nettles. You will see, however, I am obliged to run wild, being attracted by the load-stone, concatenation. No sooner had I settled the knotty point of Salmasius, than the devil put this whim into my head in the likeness of one of Pythagoras's questionings — Did Milton do more good or harm in the world? He wrote, let me inform you (for I have it from a friend who had it of —), he wrote "Lycidas," "Comus," "Paradise Lost" and other Poems, with much delectable prose; he was moreover an active friend to man all his life, and has been since his death. Very good — but, my dear Fellow, I must let you know that, as there is ever the same quantity of matter constituting this habitable globe, as the ocean notwithstanding the enormous changes and revolutions taking place in some or other of its demesnes — notwithstanding Waterspouts, whirlpools and mighty rivers emptying themselves into it — still is made up of the same bulk, nor ever varies the number of its atoms — and as a certain bulk of water was instituted at the creation — so very likely a certain portion of intellect was spun forth into the thin air, for the brains of man to prey upon it. You will see my drift without any unnecessary parenthesis. That which is contained in the Pacific could not lie in the hollow of the Caspian — that which was in Milton's head could not find room in Charles the Second's. He like a Moon attracted intellect to its flow — it has not ebbed yet, but has left the shore-pebbles all bare — I mean all Bucks, Authors of Hengist, and Castlereaghs of the present day; who without Milton's gormandizing might have been all wise men. Now for as much as I was very predisposed to a country I had heard you speak so highly of, I took particular notice of everything during my journey, and have bought some nice folio asses' skins for memorandums. I have seen everything but the wind — and that, they say, becomes visible



## Keats's Letters

by taking a dose of acorns, or sleeping one night in a hog-trough, with your tail to the Sow-Sow-West. Some of the little Bar-maids look'd at me as if I knew Jem Rice — but when I took (cherry?) Brandy they were quite convinced. One asked whether you preserved<sup>1</sup> a secret she gave you on the nail — Another, how many buttons of your coat were buttoned in general. — I told her it used to be four — But since you had become acquainted with one Martin you had reduced it to three, and had been turning this third one in your mind — and would do so with finger and thumb only you had taken to snuff. I have met with a brace or twain of little Long-heads — not a bit o' the German. All in the neatest little dresses, and avoiding all the puddles, but very fond of peppermint drops, laming ducks and . . . Well, I can't tell! I hope you are showing poor Reynolds the way to get well. Send me a good account of him, and if I can, I'll send you one of Tom. Oh! for a [fine?] day and all well! I went yesterday to Dawlish fair.

Over the Hill and over the Dale,  
And over the Bourne to Dawlish,  
Where ginger-bread wives have a scanty sale,  
And ginger-bread nuts are smallish, &c. &c.

Tom's remembrances and mine to you all.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

<sup>1</sup> Word doubtful.

## Keats's Letters

### XXXVII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Teignmouth, 25 March 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — In hopes of cheering you through a Minute or two, I was determined will he nill he to send you some lines, so you will excuse the unconnected subject and careless verse. You know, I am sure, Claude's Enchanted Castle, and I wish you may be pleased with my remembrance of it. The Rain is come on again — I think with me Devonshire stands a very poor chance. I shall damn it up hill and down dale, if it keep up to the average of six fine days in three weeks. Let me have better news of you.

Tom's remembrances to you. Remember us to all.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

### XXXVIII.<sup>1</sup>

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Wednesday —

[*Postmarks*, Teignmouth, and 10 April 1818.]

MY DEAR HAYDON: — I am glad you were pleased with my nonsense, and if it so happen that the humour takes me when I have set down to prose to you I will not gainsay it. I should be (God forgive me) ready to swear because I cannot make use of your assistance in going

<sup>1</sup> This letter may be presumed to have been written on the 8th of April, which was a Wednesday.

## Keats's Letters

through Devon if I was not in my own Mind determined to visit it thoroughly at some more favorable time of the year.

But now Tom (who is getting greatly better). is anxious to be in Town — therefore I put off my threading the County. I purpose within a month to put my knapsack at my back and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland — to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue — that is to write, to study and to see all Europe at the lowest expence. I will clamber through the Clouds and exist. I will get such an accumulation of stupendous recollections that as I walk through the suburbs of London I may not see them — I will stand upon Mount Blanc and remember this coming Summer when I intend to straddle Ben-Lomond — with my soul! — galligaskins are out of the Question. I am nearer myself to hear your Christ is being tinted into immortality. Believe me Haydon your picture is part of myself — I have ever been too sensible of the labyrinthian path to eminence in Art (judging from Poetry) ever to think I understood the emphasis of painting. The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of beauty. I know not you[r]. many havens of intenseness — nor ever can know them: but for this I hope not you achieve is lost upon me: <sup>1</sup> for when a Schoolboy the abstract Idea I had of an heroic painting — was what I cannot describe. I saw it somewhat sideways, large, prominent, round, and colour'd with magnificence — somewhat like the feel I have of Anthony and Cleopatra. Or of Alcibiades leaning on his Crimson Couch in his Galley, his broad shoulders imperceptibly

<sup>1</sup> Such is the phrase in the letter. Probably the sense is "but for all this I hope what you achieve is not lost upon me."

## Keats's Letters

heaving with the Sea. That passage in Shakespeare is finer than this —

“ See how the surly Warwick mans the Wall.”

I like your consignment of Corneille — that's the humour of it. They shall be called your Posthumous Works. I don't understand your bit of Italian. I hope she will awake from her dream and flourish fair — my respects to her. The Hedges by this time are beginning to leaf — Cats are becoming more vociferous — young Ladies who wear Watches are always looking at them. Women about forty five think the Season very backward — Ladies' Mares have but half an allowance of food. It rains here again, has been doing so for three days — however as I told you I'll take a trial in June, July, or August next year.

I am afraid Wordsworth went rather huff'd out of Town — I am sorry for it — he cannot expect his fireside Divan to be infallible — he cannot expect but that every man of worth is as proud as himself. O that he had not fit with a Warrener — that is din'd at Kingston's. I shall be in town in about a fortnight and then we will have a day or so now and then before I set out on my northern expedition — we will have no more abominable Rows — for they leave one in a fearful silence — having settled the Methodists let us be rational — not upon compulsion — no — if it will out let it — but I will not play the Bassoon any more deliberately. Remember me to Hazlitt, and Bewick —

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS —



## Keats's Letters

### XXXIX.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Thy. mornng. [Teignmouth, 9 April 1818].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—Since you all agree that the thing<sup>1</sup> is bad, it must be so—though I am not aware there is anything like Hunt in it (and if there is, it is my natural way, and I have something in common with Hunt). Look it over again, and examine into the motives, the seeds, from which any one sentence sprung—I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the public—or to anything in existence,—but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of great Men. When I am writing for myself for the mere sake of the moment's enjoyment, perhaps nature has its course with me—but a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility. If I write a Preface in a supple or subdued style, it will not be in character with me as a public speaker—I would be subdued before my friends, and thank them for subduing me—but among Multitudes of Men—I have no feel of stooping, I hate the idea of humility to them.

I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought.

Forgive me for vexing you and making a Trojan horse of such a Trifle, both with respect to the matter in Question, and myself—but it eases me to tell you—I could not live without the love of my friends—I would jump down Ætna for any great Public good—but I hate a Mawkish Popularity. I cannot be subdued before them.

<sup>1</sup> The first preface to "Endymion."

## Keats's Letters

My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about Pictures and Books — I see swarms of Porcupines with their Quills erect “like lime-twigs set to catch my Winged Book,” and I would fright them away with a torch. You will say my Preface is not much of a Torch. It would have been too insulting “to begin from Jove,” and I could not set a golden head upon a thing of clay. If there is any fault in the Preface it is not affectation, but an undersong of disrespect to the Public — if I write another Preface it must be done without a thought of those people — I will think about it. If it should not reach you in four or five days, tell Taylor to publish it without a Preface, and let the Dedication simply stand — “inscribed to the Memory of Thomas Chatterton.”

I had resolved last night to write to you this morning — I wish it had been about something else — something to greet you towards the close of your long illness. I have had one or two intimations of your going to Hampstead for a space; and I regret to see your confounded Rheumatism keeps you in Little Britain where I am sure the air is too confined. Devonshire continues rainy. As the drops beat against the window, they give me the same sensation as a quart of cold water offered to revive a half-drowned devil — no feel of the clouds dropping fatness; but as if the roots of the earth were rotten, cold, and drenched. I have not been able to go to Kent's cave at Babbicombe — however on one very beautiful day I had a fine clamber over the rocks all along as far as that place. I shall be in Town in about Ten days. We go by way of Bath on purpose to call on Bailey. I hope soon to be writing to you about the things of the north, purposing to wayfare all over these parts. I have settled my accoutrements in my own mind, and will go to gorge wonders. However, we'll have some days together before I set out.

I have many reasons for going wonder-ways: to make

## Keats's Letters

my winter chair free from spleen — to enlarge my vision — to escape disquisitions on Poetry and Kingston Criticism ;<sup>1</sup> to promote digestion and economize shoe-leather. I'll have leather buttons and belt ; and, if Brown holds his mind, over the Hills we go. If my Books will help me to it, then will I take all Europe in turn, and see the Kingdoms of the Earth and the glory of them. Tom is getting better, he hopes you may meet him at the top o' the hill. My love to your nurses.

I am ever  
Your affectionate Friend  
JOHN KEATS.

XL.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Teignmouth, Friday [10 April 1818].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS : — I am anxious you should find this Preface tolerable. If there is an affectation in it 'tis natural to me. Do let the printer's devil cook it, and let me be as "the casing air."

You are too good in this Matter — were I in your state, I am certain I should have no thought but of discontent and illness — I might though be taught patience : I had an idea of giving no Preface ; however, don't you think this had better go ? O, let it — one should not be too timid — of committing faults.

The climate here weighs us down completely ; Tom is quite low-spirited. It is impossible to live in a country which is continually under hatches. Who would live in a region of Mists, Game Laws, indemnity Bills, &c., when there is such a place as Italy ? It is said this England

<sup>1</sup> The reference may be to the Kingston whom Keats had met at Horace Smith's (see page 44), a Commissioner of Stamps.

## Keats's Letters

from its Clime produces a Spleen, able to engender the finest Sentiments, and cover the whole face of the isle with Green — so it ought, I'm sure. — I should still like the Dedication simply, as I said in my last.

I wanted to send you a few songs, written in your favorite Devon — it cannot be — Rain! Rain! Rain! I am going this morning to take a facsimile of a Letter of Nelson's, very much to his honour — you will be greatly pleased when you see it — in about a week. What a spite it is one cannot get out — the little way I went yesterday, I found a lane banked on each side with store of Primroses, while the earlier bushes are beginning to leaf.

I shall hear a good account of you soon.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

My Love to all and remember me to Taylor.

### XLI.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Teignmouth, 27 April, 1818.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — It is an awful while since you have heard from me. I hope I may not be punished, when I see you well, and so anxious as you always are for me, with the remembrance of my so seldom writing when you were so horribly confined. The most unhappy hours in our lives are those in which we recollect times past to our own blushing. If we are immortal, that must be the Hell. If I must be immortal, I hope it will be after having taken a little of "that watery labyrinth," in order to forget some of my school-boy days, and others since those.



## Keats's Letters

I have heard from George, at different times, how slowly you were recovering. It is a tedious thing—but all medical men will tell you how far a very gradual amendment is preferable; you will be strong after this, never fear. We are here still enveloped in clouds—I lay awake last night listening to the Rain, with a sense of being drowned and rotted like a grain of wheat. There is a continual courtesy between the Heavens and the Earth. The heavens rain down their unwelcomeness, and the Earth sends it up again to be returned to-morrow. Tom has taken a fancy to a physician here, Dr. Turton, and, I think, is getting better—therefore I shall perhaps remain here some months. I have written to George for some Books—shall learn Greek, and very likely Italian—and in other ways prepare myself to ask Hazlitt in about a year's time, the best metaphysical road I can take. For although I take Poetry to be Chief, yet there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among Books and thoughts on Books—I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakspeare, and as I have lately upon Milton. If you understood Greek, and would read me passages now and then, explaining their meaning, 'twould be, from its mistiness, perhaps, a greater luxury than reading the thing one's self. I shall be happy when I can do the same for you. I have written for my folio Shakspeare, in which there are the first few stanzas of my "Pot of Basil." I have the rest here finished, and will copy the whole out fair shortly, and George will bring it you. The compliment is paid by us to Boccace, whether we publish or no: so there is content in this world—mine is short—you must be deliberate about yours: you must not think of it till many months after you are quite well:—then put your passion to it, and I shall be bound up with you in the shadows of Mind, as we are in our matters of human life.

## Keats's Letters

I heard from Rice this morning — very witty — and have just written to Bailey — Don't you think I am brushing up in the letter way? and being in for it you shall hear again from me very shortly : — if you will promise not to put hand to paper for me until you can do it with a tolerable ease of health — except it be a line or two. Give my love to your Mother and Sister. Remember me to the Butlers — not forgetting Sarah.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS

### XLII.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Hampstead,

Thursday [28 May 1818].

MY DEAR BAILEY: — I should have answered your Letter on the Moment, if I could have said yes to your invitation. What hinders me is insuperable: I will tell it at a little length. You know my brother George has been out of employ for some time: it has weighed very much upon him, and driven him to scheme and turn over things in his Mind. The result has been his resolution to emigrate to the back Settlements of America, become Farmer and work with his own hands, after purchasing 14 hundred acres of the American Government. This for many reasons has met with my entire Consent — and the chief one is this; he is of too independent and liberal a Mind to get on in Trade in this Country, in which a generous Man with a scanty resource must be ruined. I would sooner he should till the ground than bow to a customer. There is no choice with him: he could not bring himself to the latter. I would not consent to his going alone; — no — but that objection is done away with: he

## Keats's Letters

will marry before he sets sail a young lady<sup>1</sup> he has known for several years, of a nature liberal and high-spirited enough to follow him to the banks of the Mississippi. He will set off in a month or six weeks, and you will see how I should wish to pass that time with him. — And then I must set out on a journey of my own. Brown and I are going a pedestrian tour through the north of England and Scotland as far as John o'Grot's. I have this morning such a lethargy that I cannot write. The reason of my delaying is oftentimes from this feeling, — I wait for a proper temper. Now you ask for an immediate answer, I do not like to wait even till to-morrow. However, I am now so depressed that I have not an idea to put to paper — my hand feels like lead — and yet it is an unpleasant numbness; it does not take away the pain of Existence. I don't know what to write.

*Monday [1 June].* — You see how I have delayed; and even now I have but a confused idea of what I should be about. My intellect must be in a degenerating state — it must be — for when I should be writing about — God knows what — I am troubling you with moods of my own mind, or rather body, for mind there is none. I am in that temper that if I were under water I would scarcely kick to come up to the top — I know very well 'tis all nonsense. In a short time I hope I shall be in a temper to feel sensibly your mention of my book. In vain have I waited till Monday to have any Interest in that, or anything else. I feel no spur at my Brother's going to America, and am almost stony-hearted about his wedding. All this will blow over. All I am sorry for is having to write to you in such a time — but I cannot force my letters in a hotbed. I could not feel comfortable in making sentences for you. I am your debtor — I must ever remain so — nor do I wish to be clear of any Rational

<sup>1</sup> Georgiana Augusta Wylie.

## Keats's Letters

debt : there is a comfort in throwing oneself on the charity of one's friends — 'tis like the albatross sleeping on its wings. I will be to you wine in the cellar, and the more modestly, or rather, indolently, I retire into the backward bin, the more Falerne will I be at the drinking. There is one thing I must mention — my Brother talks of sailing in a fortnight — if so I will most probably be with you a week before I set out for Scotland. The middle of your first page should be sufficient to rouse me. What I said is true, and I have dreamt of your mention of it, and my not answering it has weighed on me since. If I come, I will bring your letter, and hear more fully your sentiments on one or two points. I will call about the Lectures at Taylor's, and at Little Britain, to-morrow. Yesterday I dined with Hazlitt, Barnes, and Wilkie, at Haydon's. The topic was the Duke of Wellington — very amusingly pro-and-con'd. Reynolds has been getting much better; and Rice may begin to crow, for he got a little so-so at a party of his, and was none the worse for it the next morning. I hope I shall soon see you, for we must have many new thoughts and feelings to analyse, and to discover whether a little more knowledge has not made us more ignorant.

Yours affectionately

JOHN KEATS

### XLIII.

TO MISSES M. AND S. JEFFREY

Hampstead, June 4th [1818].

MY DEAR GIRLS: — I will not pretend to string a list of excuses together for not having written before — but must at once confess the indolence of my disposition, which makes a letter more formidable to me than a Pil-



## Keats's Letters

grimace. I am a fool in delay for the idea of neglect is an everlasting Knapsack which even now I have scarce power to hoist off. By the bye talking of everlasting Knapsacks I intend to make my fortune by them in case of a War (which you must consequently pray for) by contracting with Government for said materials to the economy of one branch of the Revenue. At all events a Tax which is taken from the people and shoulder'd upon the Military ought not to be snubb'd at. I promised to send you all the news. Harkee! The whole city corporation, with a deputation from the Fire Offices are now engaged at the London Coffee house in secret conclave concerning Saint Paul's Cathedral its being washed clean. Many interesting speeches have been demosthenized in said Coffee house as to the Cause of the black appearance of the said Cathedral. One of the veal-thigh Aldermen actually brought up three Witnesses to depose how they beheld the ci-devant fair Marble turn black on the tolling of the great Bell for the amiable and tea-table-lamented Princess — adding moreover that this sort of sympathy in inanimate objects was by no means uncommon for said the Gentleman “ As we were once debating in Common Hall Mr. Waithman in illustration of some case in point quoted Peter Pindar, at which the head of George the third although in hard marble squinted over the Mayor's seat at the honorable speaker so oddly that he was obliged to sit down.” However I will not tire you about these Affairs for they must be in your Newspapers by this time. You see how badly I have written these last three lines so I will remain here and take a pinch of snuff every five Minutes until my head becomes fit and proper and legitimately inclined to scribble — Oh! there's nothing like a pinch of snuff except perhaps a few trifles almost beneath a philosopher's dignity, such as a ripe Peach or a Kiss that one takes on a lease of 91 moments — on a building lease.

## Keats's Letters

Talking of that is the Capt<sup>n</sup> married yet, or rather married Miss Mitchel — is she stony hearted enough to hold out this season? Has the Doctor given Miss Perryman a little love powder? — tell him to do so. It really would not be unamusing to see her languish a little — Oh she must be quite melting this hot Weather. Are the little Robins weaned yet? Do they walk alone? You have had a christening a top o' the tiles and a Hawk has stood God father and taken the little Brood under the Shadows of its Wings much in the way of Mother Church — a Cat too has very tender bowels in such pathetic Cases. They say we are all (that is our set) mad at Hampstead. There's George took unto himself a Wife a Week ago and will in a little time sail for America — and I with a friend am preparing for a four Months Walk all over the North — and belike Tom will not stop here — he has been getting much better — Lord what a Journey I had and what a relief at the end of it — I'm sure I could not have stood it many more days. Hampstead is now in fine order. I suppose Teignmouth and the *contagious* country is now quite remarkable — you might praise it I dare say in the manner of a grammatical exercise — *The trees are full — the den<sup>1</sup> is crowded — the boats are sailing — the musick is playing.* I wish you were here a little while — but lauk we haven't got any female friend in the house. Tom is taken for a Madman and I being somewhat stunted am taken for nothing — We lounge on the Walk opposite as you might on the Den — I hope the fine season will keep up your Mother's spirits — she was used to be too much down hearted. No Women ought to be born into the world for they may not touch the bottle for shame — now a Man may creep into a bung hole — However this is a tale of a tub — however I like to play upon a pipe

<sup>1</sup> The large open space between the sea and the houses facing it is still called the Den.

## Keats's Letters

sitting upon a puncheon and intend to be so drawn in the frontispiece to my next book of Pastorals — My Brothers' respects and mine to your Mother and all our Loves to you.

Yours very sincerely

JOHN KEATS

P. S. has many significations — here it signifies Post Script — on the corner of a Handkerchief Polly Saunders — Upon a Garter Pretty Secret — Upon a Band Box Pink Sattin — At the Theatre Princes Side — on a Pulpit Parson's Snuffle — and at a Country Ale House Pail Sider.

### XLIV.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

London, 10 June 1818.

MY DEAR BAILEY: — I have been very much gratified and very much hurt by your letters in the Oxford Paper; because independent of that unlawful and mortal feeling of pleasure at praise, there is a glory in enthusiasm; and because the world is malignant enough to chuckle at the most honourable Simplicity. Yes, on my soul, my dear Bailey, you are too simple for the world — and that Idea makes me sick of it. How is it that, by extreme opposites, we have, as it were, got discontented nerves? You have all your life (I think so) believed everybody. I have suspected everybody. And, although you have been so deceived, you make a simple appeal — the world has something else to do, and I am glad of it. Were it in my choice, I would reject a Petrarchal coronation — on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers. I should not by rights speak in this tone to you for it is

## Keats's Letters

an incendiary spirit that would do so. Yet I am not old enough or magnanimous enough to annihilate self—and it would perhaps be paying you an ill compliment. I was in hopes some little time back to be able to relieve your dulness by my spirits—to point out things in the world worth your enjoyment—and now I am never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death—without placing my ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human purpose. Perhaps if my affairs were in a different state, I should not have written the above—you shall judge: I have two brothers; one is driven, by the “burden of Society,” to America; the other with an exquisite love of life, is in a lingering state. My love for my Brothers, from the early loss of our parents, and even from earlier misfortunes, has grown into an affection “passing the love of women.” I have been ill-tempered with them—I have vexed them—but the thought of them has always stifled the impression that any woman might otherwise have made upon me. I have a sister too, and may not follow them either to America or to the grave. Life must be undergone, and I certainly derive some consolation from the thought of writing one or two more poems before it ceases.

I have heard some hints of your retiring to Scotland—I should like to know your feeling on it—it seems rather remote. Perhaps Gleig will have a duty near you. I am not certain whether I shall be able to go any journey, on account of my Brother Tom, and a little indisposition of my own. If I do not you shall see me soon, if not on my return, or I'll quarter myself on you next winter. I had known my sister-in-law some time before she was my sister, and was very fond of her. I like her better and better. She is the most disinterested woman I ever knew—that is to say, she goes beyond degree in it. To see an entirely disinterested girl quite



## Keats's Letters

happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world. It depends upon a thousand circumstances. On my word it is extraordinary. Women must want imagination, and they may thank God for it; and so may we, that a delicate being can feel happy without any sense of crime. It puzzles me, and I have no sort of logic to comfort me—I shall think it over. I am not at home, and your letter being there I cannot look it over to answer any particular—only I must say I feel that passage of Dante. If I take any book with me it shall be those minute volumes of Carey, for they will go into the aptest corner.

Reynolds is getting, I may say, robust, his illness has been of service to him—like every one just recovered, he is high spirited. I hear also good accounts of Rice. With respect to domestic literature, the *Edinburgh Magazine*, in another blow-up against Hunt, calls me “the amiable Mister Keats”—and I have more than a laurel from the Quarterly Reviewers for they have smothered me in “Foliage.”<sup>1</sup> I want to read you my “Pot of Basil”—if you go to Scotland, I should much like to read it there to you, among the snows of next winter. My Brother’s remembrances to you.

Your affectionate friend  
JOHN KEATS

XLV.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Sunday evening [21 June 1818].

MY DEAR TAYLOR:—I am sorry I have not had time to call and wish you health till my return. Really I have

<sup>1</sup> There were covert references to Keats in a review of Leigh Hunt’s “Foliage.”

## Keats's Letters

been hard run these last three days. However, au revoir, God keep us all well! I start tomorrow Morning. My brother Tom will I am afraid be lonely. I can scarcely ask the loan of books for him, since I still keep those you lent me a year ago. If I am overweening, you will I know be indulgent. Therefore when you shall write, do send him some you think will be most amusing — he will be careful in returning them. Let him have one of my books bound. I am ashamed to catalogue these messages. There is but one more, which ought to go for nothing as there is a lady concerned. I promised Mrs. Reynolds one of my books bound. As I cannot write in it let the opposite be pasted in 'prythee. Remember me to Percy St. — Tell Hilton that one gratification on my return will be to find him engaged on a history piece to his own content. And tell Dewint I shall become a disputant on the landscape. Bow for me very genteely to Mrs. D. or she will not admit your diploma. Remember me to Hessey, saying I hope he'll *Carey*<sup>1</sup> his point. I would not forget Woodhouse. Adieu!

Your sincere friend,

JOHN O'GROTS.

## XLVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Dumfries, July 2nd [1818].

MY DEAR FANNY: — I intended to have written to you from Kirkcudbright, the town I shall be in to-morrow — but I will write now because my Knapsack has worn my

<sup>1</sup> The allusion is of course to some point connected with Cary's Dante, published by Taylor and Hessey and advertised at the end of "*Endymion*."

## Keats's Letters

coat in the Seams, my coat has gone to the Taylors [*sic*] and I have but one Coat to my back in these parts. I must tell you how I went to Liverpool with George and our new Sister and the Gentleman my fellow traveller through the Summer and autumn — We had a tolerable journey to Liverpool — which I left the next morning before George was up for Lancaster — Then we set off from Lancaster on foot with our Knapsacks on, and have walked a Little zig zag through the mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland — We came from Carlisle yesterday to this place — We are employed in going up Mountains, looking at strange towns, prying into old ruins and eating very hearty breakfasts. Here we are full in the Midst of broad Scotch “How is it a’ wi yoursel” — the Girls are walking about bare footed and in the worst cottages the smoke finds its way out of the door. I shall come home full of news for you and for fear I should choak you by too great a dose at once I must make you used to it by a letter or two. We have been taken for travelling Jewelers, Razor sellers and Spectacle vendors because friend Brown wears a pair — The first place we stopped at with our Knapsacks contained one Richard Bradshaw, a notorious tippler. He stood in the shape of a 3 and balanced himself as well as he could saying with his nose right in Mr. Brown’s face “Do— yo—u sell spect—ta—cles?” Mr. Abbey says we are Don Quixotes — tell him we are more generally taken for Pedlars. All I hope is that we may not be taken for excisemen in this whiskey country. We are generally up about 5 walking before breakfast and we complete our 20 miles before dinner. — Yesterday we visited Burns’s Tomb and this morning the fine Ruins of Lincluden. — I had done thus far when my coat came back fortified at all points — so as we lose no time we set forth again through Galloway — all very pleasant and pretty with no fatigue when one is used to it — We are in

## Keats's Letters

the midst of Meg Merrilies' country of whom I suppose you have heard.

I tumble into bed so fatigued that when I am asleep you might sew my nose to my great toe and trundle me round the town, like a Hoop, without waking me. Then I get so hungry a Ham goes but a very little way and fowls are like Larks to me — a Batch of Bread I make no more ado with than a sheet of parliament; and I can eat a Bull's head as easily as I used to do Bull's eyes. I take a whole string of Pork Sausages down as easily as a Pen'orth of Lady's fingers. Ah dear I must soon be contented with an acre or two of oaten cake a hogshead of Milk and a Cloaths basket of Eggs morning noon and night when I get among the Highlanders. Before we see them we shall pass into Ireland and have a chat with the Paddies, and look at the Giant's Causeway which you must have heard of — I have not time to tell you particularly for I have to send a Journal to Tom of whom you shall hear all particulars or from me when I return. Since I began this we have walked sixty miles to Newton Stewart at which place I put in this Letter — to night we sleep at Glenluce — tomorrow at Portpatrick and the next day we shall cross in the passage boat to Ireland. I hope Miss Abbey has quite recovered. Present my Respects to her and to Mr. and Mrs. Abbey. God bless you.

Your affectionate brother

JOHN —

Do write me a Letter directed to *Inverness*, Scotland.



## Keats's Letters

### XLVII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Maybole, 11 July [1818].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—I'll not run over the ground we have passed; that would be merely as bad as telling a dream—unless, perhaps, I do it in the manner of the Laputan printing press—that is, I put down Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, dells, glens, Rocks and Clouds, with beautiful, enchanting, Gothic, picturesque,—fine, delightful, enchanting, grand, sublime—a few blisters, &c.—and now you have our journey thus far: where I begin a letter to you because I am approaching Burns's cottage very fast. We have made continual inquiries from the time we saw his tomb at Dumfries—his name of course is known all about—his great reputation among the plodding people is, "that he wrote a good *mony* sensible things." One of the pleasantest means of annulling self is approaching such a shrine as the Cottage of Burns—we need not think of his misery—that is all gone, bad luck to it—I shall look upon it hereafter with unmixed pleasure, as I do upon my Stratford-on-Avon day with Bailey. I shall fill this sheet for you in the Bardie's country, going no further than this till I get to the town of Ayr which will be a nine miles' walk to Tea.

[13 July 1818?]

We were talking on different and indifferent things when, on a sudden, we turned a corner upon the immediate country of Ayr—the sight was as rich as possible. I had no Conception that the native place of Burns was so beautiful—the idea I had was more desolate, his "Rigs





## Keats's Letters

of Barley" seemed always to me but a few strips of Green on a cold hill — O prejudice! it was as rich as Devon — I endeavoured to drink in the Prospect, that I might spin it out to you, as the Silkworm makes silk from Mulberry leaves — I cannot recollect it. Besides all the Beauty, there were the mountains of Arran Isle, black and huge over the sea. We came down upon everything suddenly — there were in our way the "bonny Doon," with the Brig that Tam o' Shanter crossed, Kirk Alloway, Burns's Cottage, and the Brigs of Ayr. First we stood upon the Bridge across the Doon; surrounded by every Phantasy of green in Tree, Meadow, and Hill, — the stream of the Doon, as a Farmer told us, is covered with trees "from head to foot" — you know those beautiful heaths so fresh against the weather of a summer's evening — there was one stretching along behind the trees.

I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine, to suit it to them as nearly as possible. I could always find an egg-shell for Melancholy, and as for Merriment a Witty humour will turn anything to Account. My head is sometimes in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our Moments — that I can get into no settled strain in my Letters. My Wig! Burns and sentimentality coming across you and Frank Floodgate<sup>1</sup> in the

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Dilke records that Reynolds was originally a clerk in an Insurance Office in Serjeant's Inn. "Rice," he says, "suggested that he should become a lawyer, and his relation Mr. Fladgate — himself a literary man in early life and editor of the *Sun* newspaper — consented to receive him as an Articled Pupil, and dear generous noble James Rice — the best, and in his quaint way one of the wittiest and wisest men I ever knew — paid the fee or stamp or whatever it is called — about £110 I believe — and promised if he ever succeeded to his father's business to take him in partner. He not only kept his word, but in a few years gave up the business to him. Reynolds unhappily threw away this certain fortune. The Frank Fladgate here mentioned was Mr. Fladgate's eldest son, then Articled to his father."



## Keats's Letters

office — O Scenery that thou shouldst be crushed between two Puns! As for them I venture the rascalliest in the Scotch Region — I hope Brown does not put them punctually in his journal — if he does I must sit on the cutty-stool all next winter. We went to Kirk Alloway — “a Prophet is no Prophet in his own Country.” We went to the Cottage and took some Whisky. I wrote a sonnet for the mere sake of writing some lines under the roof — they are so bad I cannot transcribe them. The Man at the Cottage was a great Bore with his Anecdotes — I hate the rascal — his life consists in fuz, fuzzy, fuzziest. He drinks glasses five for the Quarter and twelve for the hour — he is a mahogany-faced old Jackass who knew Burns. He ought to have been kicked for having spoken to him. He calls himself “a curious old Bitch” — but he is a flat old dog — I should like to employ Caliph Vathek to kick him. O the flummery of a birthplace! Cant! cant! cant! It is enough to give a spirit the guts-ache. Many a true word, they say, is spoken in jest — this may be because his gab hindered my sublimity: the flat dog made me write a flat sonnet. My dear Reynolds — I cannot write about scenery and visitings — Fancy is indeed less than a present palpable reality, but it is greater than remembrance — you would lift your eyes from Homer only to see close before you the real Isle of Tenedos — you would rather read Homer afterwards than remember yourself. One song of Burns’s is of more worth to you than all I could think for a whole year in his native country. His Misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one’s quill — I tried to forget it — to drink Toddy without any Care — to write a merry sonnet — it won’t do — he talked with Bitches — he drank with blackguards, he was miserable. We can see horribly clear, in the works of such a Man his whole life, as if we were God’s spies. What were his addresses to Jean in the latter

## Keats's Letters

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part of his life? I should not speak so to you — yet why not — you are not in the same case — you are in the right path, and you shall not be deceived. I have spoken to you against Marriage, but it was general — the Prospect in those matters has been to me so blank, that I have not been unwilling to die — I would not now, for I have inducements to Life — I must see my little Nephews in America, and I must see you marry your lovely Wife. My sensations are sometimes deadened for weeks together — but believe me I have more than once yearned for the time of your happiness to come, as much as I could for myself after the lips of Juliet. From the tenor of my occasional rhodomontade in chit-chat, you might have been deceived concerning me in these points — upon my soul, I have been getting more and more close to you, every day, ever since I knew you, and now one of the first pleasures I look to is your happy Marriage — the more, since I have felt the pleasure of loving a sister in Law. I did not think it possible to become so much attached in so short a time. Things like these, and they are real, have made me resolve to have a care of my health — you must be as careful.

The rain has stopped us to-day at the end of a dozen Miles, yet we hope to see Loch Lomond the day after to-morrow; — I will piddle out my information, as Rice says, next Winter, at any time when a substitute is wanted for Vingt-un. We bear the fatigue very well — 20 miles a day in general. A cloud came over us in getting up Skiddaw — I hope to be more lucky in Ben Lomond — and more lucky still in Ben Nevis. What I think you would enjoy is poking about Ruins, sometimes Abbey, sometimes Castle.

The short stay we made in Ireland has left few remembrances — but an old woman in a dog-kennel Sedan with a pipe in her Mouth, is what I can never forget — I wish

## Keats's Letters

I may be able to give you an idea of her. — Remember me to your Mother and Sisters, and tell your Mother how I hope she will pardon me for having a scrap of paper pasted in the Book sent to her.<sup>1</sup> I was driven on all sides and had not time to call on Taylor. — So Bailey is coming to Cumberland — well, if you'll let me know where at Inverness, I can call on my return and pass a little time with him — I am glad 'tis not Scotland.

Tell my friends I do all I can for them, that is drink their healths in Toddy. Perhaps I may have some lines by and by to send you fresh, on your own Letter — Tom has a few to show you.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

### XLVIII.

TO THOMAS KEATS

Cairn-something July 17th [1818].

MY DEAR TOM: — Here's Brown going on so that I cannot bring to mind how the two last days have vanished — for example he says The Lady of the Lake went to Rock herself to sleep on Arthur's seat and the Lord of the Isles coming to Press a Piece . . . remembered their last meeting at Corrystone Water so touching her with one hand . . .<sup>2</sup> I told you last how we were stared at in Glasgow — we are not out of the Crowd yet. Steam Boats on Loch Lomond and Barouches on its sides take a little from the Pleasure of such romantic chaps as Brown

<sup>1</sup> A copy of "Endymion," with "from the Author" written on a scrap of paper left in London to be pasted in.

<sup>2</sup> The passages omitted consist of somewhat incoherent strings of place-names arranged apparently with an ulterior view to puns; but the intention is not quite clear, and the sentence ends abruptly without any construction as far as I can make out.

## Keats's Letters

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and I. The Banks of the Clyde are extremely Beautiful — the north end of Loch Lomond grand in excess — the entrance at the lower end to the narrow part from a little distance is precious good — the Evening was beautiful nothing could surpass our fortune in the weather — yet was I worldly enough to wish for a fleet of chivalry Barges with Trumpets and Banners just to die away before me into that blue place among the mountains.

Not[a] B[ene] — the Water was a fine Blue silvered and the Mountains a dark purple, the Sun setting aslant behind them — meantime the head of ben Lomond was covered with a rich Pink Cloud — We did not ascend Ben Lomond — the price being very high and a half a day of rest being quite acceptable. We were up at 4 this morning and have walked to breakfast 15 Miles through two Tremendous Glens — at the end of the first there is a place called rest and be thankful which we took for an Inn — it was nothing but a Stone and so we were cheated into 5 more Miles to Breakfast — I have just been bathing in Loch Fyne a salt water Lake opposite the Windows, — quite pat and fresh but for the cursed Gad flies — damn 'em they have been at me ever since I left the swan and two necks.

Last Evening we came round the End of Loch Fyne to Inverary — the Duke of Argyle's Castle is very modern magnificent and more so from the place it is in — the woods seem old enough to remember two or three changes in the Crag about them — the Lake was beautiful and there was a Band at a distance by the Castle. I must say I enjoyed two or three common tunes — but nothing could stifle the horrors of a solo on the Bag-pipe — I thought the Beast would never have done. — Yet was I doomed to hear another. — On entering Inverary we saw a Play Bill. Brown was knocked up from new shoes — so I went to the Barn alone where I saw the Stranger accom-



## Keats's Letters

panied by a Bag-pipe. There they went on about interesting creators and human nater till the Curtain fell and then came the Bag-pipe. When Mrs. Haller fainted down went the Curtain and out came the Bag-pipe—at the heartrending, shoemending reconciliation the Piper blew amain. I never read or saw this play before; not the Bag-pipe nor the wretched players themselves were little in comparison with it—thank heaven it has been scoffed at lately almost to a fashion.

I think we are the luckiest fellows in Christendom—Brown could not proceed this morning on account of his feet and lo there is thunder and rain.

July 20th [1818]. For these two days past we have been so badly accommodated more particularly in coarse food that I have not been at all in cue to write. Last night poor Brown with his feet blistered and scarcely able to walk, after a trudge of 20 Miles down the side of Loch Awe had no supper but Eggs and Oat Cake—we have lost the sight of white bread entirely—Now we had eaten nothing but Eggs all day—about 10 a piece and they had become sickening—To-day we have fared rather better—but no oat Cake wanting—we had a small Chicken and even a good bottle of Port but all together the fare is too coarse—I feel it a little.—Another week will break us in. I forgot to tell you that when we came through Glenside it was early in the morning and we were pleased with the noise of Shepherds, Sheep and dogs in the misty heights close above us—we saw none of them for some time, till two came in sight creeping among the Craggs like Emmets, yet their voices came quite plainly to us—The approach to Loch Awe was very solemn towards nightfall—the first glance was a streak of water deep in the Bases of large black Mountains.—We had come along a complete mountain road, where if one listened there was not a sound but that of Mountain Streams. We walked 20

## Keats's Letters

Miles by the side of Loch Awe — every ten steps creating a new and beautiful picture — sometimes through little wood — there are two islands on the Lake each with a beautiful ruin — one of them rich in ivy. — We are detained this morning by the rain. I will tell you exactly where we are. We are between Loch Craignish and the sea just opposite Long Island. Yesterday our walk was of this description — the near Hills were not very lofty but many of them steep, beautifully wooded — the distant Mountains in the Hebrides very grand, the Saltwater Lakes coming up between Craggs and Islands full tide and scarcely ruffled — sometimes appearing as one large Lake, sometimes as three distinct ones in different directions. At one point we saw afar off a rocky opening into the main sea. — We have also seen an Eagle or two. They move about without the least motion of Wings when in an indolent fit. — I am for the first time in a country where a foreign Language is spoken — they gabble away Gaelic at a vast rate — numbers of them speak English. There are not many Kilts in Argyllshire — at Fort William they say a Man is not admitted into Society without one — the Ladies there have a horror at the indecency of Breeches. I cannot give you a better idea of Highland Life than by describing the place we are in. The Inn or public is by far the best house in the immediate neighbourhood. It has a white front with tolerable windows — the table I am writing on surprises me as being a nice flapped Mahogany one; at the same time the place has no water-closet nor any thing like it. You may if you peep see through the floor chinks into the ground rooms. The old Grandmother of the house seems intelligent though not over clean. N.B. No snuff being to be had in the village she made us some. The Guid Man is a rough looking hardy stout Man who I think does not speak so much English as the Guid wife who is very obliging and

## Keats's Letters

sensible and moreover though stockingless has a pair of old Shoes — Last night some Whisky Men sat up clattering Gælic till I am sure one o'Clock to our great annoyance. There is a Gælic Testament on the Drawers in the next room. White and blue China ware has crept all about here — Yesterday there passed a Donkey laden with tin-pots — opposite the Window there are hills in a Mist — a few Ash trees and a mountain stream at a little distance. — They possess a few head of Cattle. — If you had gone round to the back of the House just now — you would have seen more hills in a Mist — some dozen wretched black Cottages scented of peat smoke which finds its way by the door or a hole in the roof — a girl here and there barefoot. There was one little thing driving Cows down a slope like a mad thing. There was another standing at the cowhouse door rather pretty fac'd all up to the ankles in dirt. We have walk'd 15 Miles in a soaking rain to Oban opposite the Isle of Mull which is so near Staffa — we had thought to pass to it — but the expense is 7 Guineas and those rather extorted. — Staffa you see is a fashionable place and therefore every one concerned with it either in this town or the Island are what you call up. 'Tis like paying sixpence for an apple at the playhouse — this irritated me and Brown was not best pleased — we have therefore resolved to set northward for Fort William to-morrow morning. I fed upon a bit of white Bread to-day like a Sparrow — it was very fine — I cannot manage the cursed Oat Cake. Remember me to all and let me hear a good account of you at Inverness. I am sorry Georgy had not those lines. Good bye.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN ———

## Keats's Letters

### XLIX.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Inverary, July 18, [1818].

MY DEAR BAILEY:—The only day I have had a chance of seeing you when you were last in London I took every advantage of—some devil led you out of the way. Now I have written to Reynolds to tell me where you will be in Cumberland—so that I cannot miss you. And when I see you, the first thing I shall do will be to read that about Milton and Ceres, and Proserpine—yet though I am not going after you to John o' Grot's, it will be but poetical to say so. And here, Bailey, I will say a few words written in a sane and sober mind, a very scarce thing with me, for they may, hereafter, save you a great deal of trouble about me, which you do not deserve, and for which I ought to be bastinadoed. I carry all matters to an extreme—so that when I have any little vexation, it grows in five minutes into a theme for Sophocles. Then, and in that temper, if we write to any friend, I have so little self-possession that I give him matter for grieving, at the very time perhaps when I am laughing at a Pun. Your last letter made me blush for the pain I had given you—I know my own disposition so well that I am certain of writing many times hereafter in the same strain to you—now, you know how far to believe in them. You must allow for Imagination. I know I shall not be able to help it.

I am sorry you are grieved at my not continuing my visits to Little Britain.<sup>1</sup> Yet I think I have as far as a Man can do who has Books to read and subjects to think

<sup>1</sup> Where the Reynolds family lived.



## Keats's Letters

upon — for that reason I have been no where else except to Wentworth Place so nigh at hand — moreover I have been too often in a state of health that made it prudent not to hazard the night air. Yet, further, I will confess to you that I cannot enjoy Society small or numerous. I am certain that our fair friends are glad I should come for the mere sake of my coming; but I am certain I bring with me a vexation they are better without. If I can possibly at any time feel my temper coming upon me I refrain even from a promised visit. I am certain I have not a right feeling towards women — at this moment I am striving to be just to them, but I cannot. Is it because they fall so far beneath my boyish Imagination? When I was a schoolboy I thought a fair woman a pure Goddess; my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not. I have no right to expect more than their reality — I thought them ethereal above men — I find them perhaps equal — great by comparison is very small. Insult may be inflicted in more ways than by word or action. One who is tender of being insulted does not like to think an insult against another. I do not like to think insults in a lady's company — I commit a crime with her which absence would not have known. Is it not extraordinary? — when among men, I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen — I feel free to speak or to be silent — I can listen, and from every one I can learn — my hands are in my pockets, I am free from all suspicion and comfortable. When I am among women, I have evil thoughts, malice, spleen — I cannot speak, or be silent — I am full of suspicions, and therefore listen to nothing — I am in a hurry to be gone. You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since my boyhood. Yet with such feelings I am happier alone among crowds of men, by myself, or with a friend or two. With all this, trust me,

## Keats's Letters

I have not the least idea that men of different feelings and inclinations are more short-sighted than myself. I never rejoiced more than at my Brother's marriage, and shall do so at that of any of my friends. I must absolutely get over this—but how? the only way is to find the root of the evil, and so cure it “with backward mutters of dissevering power”<sup>1</sup>—that is a difficult thing; for an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravel, and care to keep unravelled. I could say a good deal about this, but I will leave it, in hopes of better and more worthy dispositions—and also content that I am wronging no one, for after all I do think better of womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet high likes them or not. You appeared to wish to know my moods on this subject—don't think it a bore my dear fellow, it shall be my Amen. I should not have consented to myself these four months tramping in the highlands, but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more prejudice, use me to more hardship, identify finer scenes, load me with grander mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among books, even though I should reach Homer. By this time I am comparatively a Mountaineer. I have been among wilds and mountains too much to break out much about their grandeur. I have fed upon oat-cake—not long enough to be very much attached to it.—The first mountains I saw, though not so large as some I have since seen, weighed very solemnly upon me. The effect is wearing away—yet I like them mainly. We have come this evening<sup>2</sup> with a guide—for without was impossible—into the middle of the Isle of Mull, pursuing our cheap journey to Iona, and perhaps Staffa. We would not

<sup>1</sup> See Milton's “Comus” (816–19).      <sup>2</sup> The 22d of July, 1818.

## Keats's Letters

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follow the common and fashionable mode, from the great Imposition of Expense. We have come over heath and rock, and river and bog, to what in England would be called a horrid place. Yet it belongs to a Shepherd pretty well off perhaps. The family speak not a word but Gaelic, and we have not yet seen their faces for the smoke, which, after visiting every cranny (not excepting my eyes very much incommoded for writing), finds its way out at the door. I am more comfortable than I could have imagined in such a place, and so is Brown. The people are all very kind. We lost our way a little yesterday; and inquiring at a Cottage, a young woman without a word threw on her cloak and walked a mile in a mizzling rain and splashy way to put us right again.

I could not have had a greater pleasure in these parts than your mention of my sister. She is very much prisoned from me. I am afraid it will be some time before I can take her to many places I wish. I trust we shall see you ere long in Cumberland—at least I hope I shall, before my visit to America, more than once. I intend to pass a whole year there, if I live to the completion of the three next. My sister's welfare, and the hopes of such a stay in America, will make me observe your advice. I shall be prudent, and more careful of my health than I have been. I hope you will be about paying your first visit to town after settling when we come into Cumberland—Cumberland however will be no distance to me after my present journey. I shall spin to you in a Minute. I begin to get rather a contempt of distances. I hope you will have a nice convenient room for a library. Now you are so well in health, do keep it up by never missing your dinner, by not reading hard, and by taking proper exercise. You'll have a horse, I suppose, so you must make a point of sweating him. You say I must study Dante—well, the only books I have with me

## Keats's Letters

are those 3 little volumes.<sup>1</sup> I read that fine passage you mention a few days ago. Your letter followed me from Hampstead to Port Patrick, and thence to Glasgow. You must think me, by this time, a very pretty fellow. One of the pleasantest bouts we have had was our walk to Burns's Cottage, over the Doon, and past Kirk Alloway. I had determined to write a sonnet in the Cottage. I did — but lawk! it was so wretched I destroyed it — however in a few days afterwards I wrote some lines cousin-german to the circumstance.

Reynold's illness has made him a new man — he will be stronger than ever — before I left London he was really getting a fat face. Brown keeps on writing volumes of adventures to Dilke. When we get in of an evening and I have perhaps taken my rest on a couple of chairs, he affronts my indolence and Luxury by pulling out of his knapsack 1st his paper — 2ndly his pens and last his ink. Now I would not care if he would change a little. I say now why not, Bailey, take out his pens first sometimes? But I might as well tell a hen to hold up her head before she drinks instead of afterwards.

Your affectionate Friend

JOHN KEATS

L.

TO THOMAS KEATS

Dun an cullen<sup>2</sup> [23 July 1818].

MY DEAR TOM: — Just after my last had gone to the Post, in came one of the Men with whom we endeavoured

<sup>1</sup> "The Vision; or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri. Translated by the Rev. H. F. Cary, A. M. In three volumes. London: Printed for Taylor and Hessey, 93 Fleet Street. 1814."

<sup>2</sup> Possibly a mistake of Keats's for Derrynaculen.



## Keats's Letters

to agree about going to Staffa — he said what a pity it was we should turn aside and not see the curiosities. So we had a little talk and finally agreed that he should be our guide across the Isle of Mull. We set out, crossed two ferries, one to the Isle of Kerrera of little distance, the other from Kerrera to Mull 9 miles across — we did it in forty minutes with a fine Breeze. The road through the Island, or rather the track, is the most dreary you can think of — between dreary Mountains — over bog and rock and river with our Breeches tucked up and our Stockings in hand. About eight o'Clock we arrived at a shepherd's Hut into which we could scarcely get for the Smoke through a door lower than my shoulders. We found our way into a little compartment with the rafters and turf thatch blackened with smoke — the earth floor full of Hills and Dales. We had some white Bread with us, made a good supper and slept in our Clothes in some Blankets; our Guide snored on another little bed about an arm's length off. This morning we came about six Miles to Breakfast by rather a better path and we are now in by comparison a Mansion. Our guide is I think a very obliging fellow — in the way this morning he sang us two Gaelic songs — one made by a Mrs. Brown on her husband's being drowned — the other a Jacobin one on Charles Stuart. For some days Brown has been enquiring out his Genealogy here — he thinks his Grandfather came from long Island — he got a parcel of people about him at a cottage door last evening — chatted with one who had been a Miss Brown and who I think from a likeness must have been a Relation — he jawed with the old Woman — flattered a young one — kissed a child who was afraid of his spectacles and finally drank a pint of Milk. They handle his spectacles as we do a sensitive leaf.

*July 26th* [1818]. — Well! we had a most wretched walk of 37 miles across the Island of Mull and then we

## Keats's Letters

crossed to Iona or Icolmkill; from Icolmkill we took a boat at a bargain to take us to Staffa and land us at the head of Loch Nakeal<sup>1</sup> whence we should only have to walk half the distance to Oban again and on a better road. All this is well passed and done with this singular piece of Luck that there was an interruption in the bad Weather just as we saw Staffa at which it is impossible to land but in a tolerable calm sea. But I will first mention Icolmkill — I know not whether you have heard much about this island; I never did before I came nigh it. It is rich in the most interesting Antiquities. Who would expect to find the ruins of a fine Cathedral Church, of Cloisters, Colleges, Monasteries and Nunneries in so remote an Island? The beginning of these things was in the sixth Century under the superstition of a would-be Bishop-saint who landed from Ireland and chose the spot from its beauty — for at that time the now treeless place was covered with magnificent Woods. Columba in the Gaelic is Colm signifying Dove — Kill signifies church and I is as good as Island — so I-colum-kill means the Island of Saint Columba's Church. Now this Saint Columba became the Dominic of the barbarian Christians of the north and was famed also far south — but more especially was revered by the Scots, the Picts, the Norwegians, the Irish. In a course of years perhaps the island was considered the most holy ground of the north, and the old Kings of the aforementioned nations chose it for their burial place. We were shown a spot in the Churchyard where they say 61 kings are buried, 48 Scotch, from Fergus 2nd to Macbeth, 8 Irish, 4 Norwegians and 1 French — they lie in rows compact. Then we were shown other matters of later date but still very ancient — many tombs of Higland Chieftains — their effigies in complete armour face upward black and moss-covered — Abbots and Bishops of

<sup>1</sup> Keats wrote "Nakgal."

## Keats's Letters

the island always of one of the chief Clans. There were plenty Macleans and Macdonnells, among these latter the famous Macdonel Lord of the Isles. There have been 300 Crosses in the island but the Presbyterians destroyed all but two, one of which is a very fine one and completely covered with a shaggy coarse Moss. The old Schoolmaster, an ignorant little man but reckoned very clever, showed us these things. He is a Maclean and as much above 4 foot as he is under 4 foot 3 inches — he stops at one glass of whisky unless you press another and at the second unless you press a third. I am puzzled how to give you an Idea of Staffa. It can only be represented by a first rate drawing. One may compare the surface of the Island to a roof — this roof is supported by grand pillars of basalt standing together as thick as honeycombs. The finest thing is Fingal's Cave — it is entirely a hollowing out of Basalt Pillars. Suppose now the Giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole Mass of black Columns and bound them together like bunches of matches — and then with immense axes had made a cavern in the body of these columns — of course the roof and floor must be composed of the broken ends of the Columns — such is Fingal's Cave except that the Sea has done the work of excavations and is continually dashing there — so that we walk along the sides of the cave on the pillars which are left as if for convenient stairs — the roof is arched somewhat gothic-wise and the length of some of the entire side-pillars is 50 feet. About the island you might seat an army of Men each on a pillar. The length of the Cave is 120 feet and from its extremity the view into the sea through the large arch at the entrance — the colour of the columns is a sort of black with a lurking gloom of purple therein. For solemnity and grandeur it far surpasses the finest Cathedral. At the extremity of the Cave there is a small perforation into another cave, at which the waters meeting and

## Keats's Letters

buffeting each other there is sometimes produced a report as of a cannon heard as far as Iona which must be twelve miles. As we approached in the boat there was such a fine swell of the sea that the pillars appeared rising immediately out of the crystal. But it is impossible to describe it.

The western coast of Scotland is a most strange place — it is composed of rocks, Mountains, mountainous and rocky Islands, intersected by Lochs — you can go but a short distance anywhere from salt water in the highlands.

I have a slight sore throat and think it best to stay a day or two at Oban. Then we shall proceed to Fort William and Inverness — where I am anxious to be on account of a letter from you. Brown in his letters puts down every little circumstance. I should like to do the same but I confess myself too indolent and besides next winter every thing will come up in prime order as we verge on such and such things.

Have you heard in any way of George? I should think by this time he must have landed — I in my carelessness never thought of knowing where a letter would find him on the other side — I think Baltimore but I am afraid of directing it to the wrong place. I shall begin some chequer work for him directly and it will be ripe for the post by the time I hear from you next after this. I assure you I often long for a seat and a Cup o' tea at Well Walk — especially now that mountains, castles and Lakes are becoming common to me — yet I would rather summer it out, for on the whole I am happier than when I have time to be glum — perhaps it may cure me. Immediately on my return I shall begin studying hard with a peep at the theatre now and then — and depend upon it I shall be very luxurious. With respect to Women I think I shall be able to conquer my passions hereafter better than I have yet done. You will help me to talk of George next winter



## Keats's Letters

and we will go now and then to see Fanny. Let me hear a good account of your health and comfort telling me truly how you do alone.

Remember me to all including Mr. and Mrs. Bentley.

Your most affectionate brother

JOHN

### LI.

TO MRS. WYLIE <sup>1</sup>

Inverness, 6 August [1818].

MY DEAR MADAM: — It was a great regret to me that I should leave all my friends, just at the moment when I might have helped to soften away the time for them. I wanted not to leave my brother Tom, but more especially, believe me, I should like to have remained near you, were it but for an atom of consolation after parting with so dear a daughter. My brother George has ever been more than a brother to me; he has been my greatest friend, and I can never forget the sacrifice you have made for his happiness. As I walk along the Mountains here I am full of these things, and lay in wait, as it were, for the pleasure of seeing you immediately on my return to town. I wish, above all things, to say a word of Comfort to you, but I know not how. It is impossible to prove that black is white; it is impossible to make out that sorrow is joy, or joy is sorrow.

Tom tells me that you called on Mrs. Haslam, with a newspaper giving an account of a gentleman in a Fur cap, falling over a precipice in Kirkcudbrightshire. If it was me, I did it in a dream, or in some magic interval between the first and second cup of tea; which is nothing extraordinary when we hear that Mahomet, in getting out of

<sup>1</sup> The mother of Mrs. George Keats.

## Keats's Letters

Bed, upset a jug of water, and, whilst it was falling, took a fortnight's trip, as it seemed, to Heaven; yet was back in time to save one drop of water being spilt. As for Fur caps, I do not remember one beside my own, except at Carlisle: this was a very good Fur cap I met in High Street, and I dare say was the unfortunate one. I dare say that the Fates, seeing but two Fur caps in the north, thought it too extraordinary, and so threw the dies which of them should be drowned. The lot fell upon Jones: I dare say his names was Jones. All I hope is that the gaunt Ladies said not a word about hanging; if they did I shall repent that I was not half-drowned in Kirkcudbright.

Stop! let me see! — being half-drowned by falling from a precipice, is a very romantic affair: why should I not take it to myself? How glorious to be introduced in a drawing-room to a Lady who reads Novels, with "Mr. So-and-so — Miss So-and-so; Miss So-and-so, this is Mr. So-and-so, who fell off a precipice and was half-drowned." Now I refer to you, whether I should lose so fine an opportunity of making my fortune. No romance lady could resist me — none. Being run under a Wagon — side-lamed in a playhouse, Apoplectic through Brandy — and a thousand other tolerably decent things for badness, would be nothing, but being tumbled over a precipice into the sea — oh! it would make my fortune — especially if you could contrive to hint, from this bulletin's authority, that I was not upset on my own account, but that I dashed into the waves after Jessy of Dumblane, and pulled her out by the hair; — but that, alas! she was dead, or she would have made me happy with her hand — however in this you may use your own discretion. But I must leave joking, and seriously aver, that I have been *werry* romantic indeed among these Mountains and Lakes. I have got wet through, day after day — eaten oat-cake, and drank

## Keats's Letters

Whisky — walked up to my knees in Bog — got a sore throat — gone to see Icolmkill and Staffa; met with wholesome food just here and there as it happened — went up Ben Nevis, and — N. B., came down again. Sometimes when I am rather tired I lean rather languishingly on a rock, and long for some famous Beauty to get down from her Palfrey in passing, approach me, with — her saddlebags, and give me — a dozen or two capital roast-beef Sandwiches.

When I come into a large town, you know there is no putting one's Knapsack into one's fob, so the people stare. We have been taken for Spectacle-vendors, Razor-sellers, Jewellers, travelling linen-draper, Spies, Excisemen, and many things I have no idea of. When I asked for letters at Port Patrick, the man asked what regiment? I have had a peep also at Little Ireland. Tell Henry I have not camped quite on the bare Earth yet, but nearly as bad, in walking through Mull, for the Shepherd's huts you can scarcely breathe in, for the Smoke which they seem to endeavour to preserve for smoking on a large scale. Besides riding about 400, we have walked above 600 Miles, and may therefore reckon ourselves as set out.

I assure you, my dear Madam, that one of the greatest pleasures I shall have on my return, will be seeing you, and that I shall ever be

Yours, with the greatest respect and sincerity,  
JOHN KEATS.

### LII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Hampstead, Tuesday [*Postmark*, 25 August 1818].

MY DEAR FANNY: — I have just written to Mr. Abbey to ask him to let you come and see poor Tom who has

## Keats's Letters

lately been much worse. He is better at present — sends his Love to you and wishes much to see you — I hope he will shortly — I have not been able to come to Walthamstow on his account as well as a little Indisposition of my own. I have asked Mr. A. to write me — if he does not mention any thing of it to you, I will tell you what reasons he has though I do not think he will make any objection. Write me what you want with a Flageolet and I will get one ready for you by the time you come.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### LIII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

[Hampstead, 21 or 22 September 1818.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS: — Believe me I have rather rejoiced at your happiness than fretted at your silence. Indeed I am grieved on your account that I am not at the same time happy. But I conjure you to think at present of nothing but pleasure — “Gather the rose, &c.” — gorge the honey of life. I pity you as much that it cannot last for ever, as I do myself now drinking bitters. Give yourself up to it — you cannot help it — and I have a consolation in thinking so. I never was in love — yet the voice and shape of a Woman<sup>1</sup> has haunted me these two days — at such a time, when the relief, the feverous relief of Poetry seems a much less crime. This morning Poetry has conquered — I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life — I feel escaped from a new strange and threatening sorrow — and I am thankful for it. There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality.

<sup>1</sup> Jane Cox, a cousin of the Reynoldses.



## Keats's Letters

Poor Tom — that woman — and Poetry were ringing changes in my senses. Now I am in comparison happy — I am sensible this will distress you — you must forgive me. Had I known you would have set out so soon I could have sent you the “Pot of Basil” for I had copied it out ready.

I should have seen Rice ere this — but I am confined by Sawrey's mandate in the house now, and have as yet only gone out in fear of the damp night. — You know what an undangerous matter it is. I shall soon be quite recovered. Your offer I shall remember as though it had even now taken place in fact. — I think it cannot be. Tom is not up yet — I cannot say he is better. I have not heard from George.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS.

### LIV.

TO JAMES AUGUSTUS HESSEY

9 October 1818.

MY DEAR HESSEY : — You are very good in sending me the letters from the *Chronicle* — and I am very bad in not acknowledging such a kindness sooner — pray forgive me. It has so chanced that I have had that paper every day — I have seen to-day's. I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness. — Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could possibly inflict —

## Keats's Letters

and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine. J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the slipshod Endymion. That it is so is no fault of mine. No! — though it may sound a little paradoxical. It is as good as I had power to make it — by myself. Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble — I will write independently. — I have written independently *without Judgment*. I may write independently and *with Judgment*, hereafter. The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In “Endymion,” I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest. But I am nigh getting into a rant. So, with remembrances to Taylor and Woodhouse &c. I am

Yours very sincerely

JOHN KEATS.

LV.

TO FANNY KEATS

Hampstead, Friday Morn  
[*Postmark*, 16 October 1818.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — You must not condemn me for not being punctual to Thursday, for I really did not know

## Keats's Letters

whether it would not affect poor Tom too much to see you. You know how it hurt him to part with you the last time. At all events you shall hear from me; and if Tom keeps pretty well to-morrow, I will see Mr. Abbey the next day, and endeavour to settle that you shall be with us on Tuesday or Wednesday. I have good news from George—He has landed safely with our Sister—they are both in good health—their prospects are good—and they are by this time nighing to their journey's end—you shall hear the particulars soon.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN

Tom's love to you.

### LVI.

TO RICHARD WOODHOUSE

[*Postmark*, Hampstead, 27 October 1818.]

MY DEAR WOODHOUSE:—Your letter gave me great satisfaction, more on account of its friendliness than any relish of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the “genus irritabile.” The best answer I can give you is in a clerklike manner to make some observations on two principal points which seem to point like indices into the midst of the whole pro and con about genius, and views, and achievements, and ambition, et cætera. 1st. As to the poetical character itself (I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical Sublime; which is a thing per se, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—It is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated.—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an

## Keats's Letters

Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity — he is continually in for and filling some other body. The Sun, — the Moon, — the Sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet has none, no identity — he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's creatures. — If then he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical Nature — how can it, when I have no Nature? When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated — not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of Children. I know not whether I make myself wholly understood: I hope enough so to let you see that no dependence is to be placed on what I said that day.

In the 2d place, I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself. I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared, that may be the work of maturer years — in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is, that I may not lose all



## Keats's Letters

interest in human affairs — that the solitary Indifference I feel for applause, even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will. I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every Morning, and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself, but from some Character in whose soul I now live.

I am sure, however, that this next sentence is from myself — I feel your anxiety, good opinion, and friendship, in the highest degree, and am

Yours most sincerely

JOHN KEATS.

### LVII.

TO GEORGE AND GEORGINA KEATS

[October 1818.]

MY DEAR GEORGE: — There was a part in your Letter which gave me a great deal of pain, that where you lament not receiving Letters from England. I intended to have written immediately on my return from Scotland (which was two Months earlier than I had intended on account of my own as well as Tom's health), but then I was told by Mrs. W[ylie] that you had said you would not wish any one to write till we had heard from you. This I thought odd and now I see that it could not have been so; yet, at the time I suffered my unreflecting head to be satisfied, and went on in that sort of abstract careless and restless Life with which you are well acquainted. This sentence should it give you any uneasiness do not let it last for before I finish it will be explained away to your satisfaction.

## Keats's Letters

I grieve to say I am not sorry you had not Letters at Philadelphia; you could have had no good news of Tom and I have been withheld on his account from beginning these many days; I could not bring myself to say the truth, that he is no better but much worse. However it must be told and you must my dear Brother and Sister take example from me and bear up against any Calamity for my sake as I do for yours. Our's are ties which independent of their own Sentiment are sent us by providence to prevent the deleterious effects of one great solitary grief. I have Fanny<sup>1</sup> and I have you — three people whose Happiness to me is sacred — and it does annul that selfish sorrow which I should otherwise fall into, living as I do with poor Tom who looks upon me as his only comfort — the tears will come into your Eyes — let them — and embrace each other — thank heaven for what happiness you have, and after thinking a moment or two that you suffer in common with all Mankind hold it not a sin to regain your cheerfulness.

I will relieve you of one uneasiness overleaf: I returned I said on account of my health — I am now well from a bad sore throat which came of bog trotting in the Island of Mull — of which you shall hear by the copies I shall make from my Scotch Letters.

Your content in each other is a delight to me which I cannot express — the Moon is now shining full and brilliant — she is the same to me in Matter, what you are to me in Spirit. If you were here my dear Sister I could not pronounce the words which I can write to you from a distance: I have a tenderness for you, and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than I can have for any woman in the world. You will mention Fanny — her character is not formed, her identity does not press upon me as yours does. I hope from the bot-

<sup>1</sup> Keats's sister.

## Keats's Letters

tom of my heart that I may one day feel as much for her as I do for you — I know not how it is, but I have never made any acquaintance of my own — nearly all through your medium my dear Brother — through you I know not only a Sister but a glorious human being. And now I am talking of those to whom you have made me known I cannot forbear mentioning Haslam as a most kind and obliging and constant friend. His behaviour to Tom during my absence and since my return has endeared him to me for ever — besides his anxiety about you. Tomorrow I shall call on your Mother and exchange information with her. On Tom's account I have not been able to pass so much time with her as I would otherwise have done — I have seen her but twice — one I dined with her and Charles. She was well, in good spirits, and I kept her laughing at my bad jokes. We went to tea at Mrs. Millar's, and in going were particularly struck with the light and shade through the Gateway at the Horse Guards. I intend to write you such Volumes that it will be impossible for me to keep any order or method in what I write: that will come first which is uppermost in my Mind, not that which is uppermost in my heart — besides I should wish to give you a picture of our Lives here whenever by a touch I can do it; even as you must see by the last sentence our walk past Whitehall all in good health and spirits — this I am certain of, because I felt so much pleasure from the simple idea of your playing a game at Cricket. At Mrs. Millar's I saw Henry quite well — there was Miss Keasle — and the good-natured Miss Waldegrave — Mrs. Millar began a long story and you know it is her Daughter's way to help her on as though her tongue were ill of the gout. Mrs. M. certainly tells a story as though she had been taught her alphabet in Crutched Friars. Dilke has been very unwell; I found him very ailing on my return — he was

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under Medical care for some time, and then went to the Sea Side whence he has returned well. Poor little Mrs. D. has had another gall-stone attack; she was well ere I returned — she is now at Brighton. Dilke was greatly pleased to hear from you, and will write a letter for me to enclose. He seems greatly desirous of hearing from you of the settlement itself.

I came by ship from Inverness, and was nine days at Sea without being sick — a little qualm now and then put me in mind of you — however as soon as you touch the shore all the Horrors of Sickness are soon forgotten, as was the case with a Lady on board who could not hold her head up all the way. We had not been in the Thames an hour before her tongue began to some tune; paying off as it was fit she should all old scores. I was the only Englishman on board. There was a downright Scotchman who hearing that there had been a bad crop of Potatoes in England had brought some triumphant specimens from Scotland — these he exhibited with national pride to all the Lightermen and Watermen from the Nore to the Bridge. I fed upon beef all the way; not being able to eat the thick Porridge which the Ladies managed to manage with large awkward horn spoons into the bargain. Severn has had a narrow escape of his Life from a Typhous fever; he is now gaining strength. Reynolds has returned from a six weeks' enjoyment in Devonshire — he is well, and persuades me to publish my "Pot of Basil" as an answer to the attacks made on me in *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*. There have been two letters in my defence in the *Chronicle* and one in the *Examiner*, copied from the Alfred Exeter paper, and written by Reynolds. I don't know who wrote those in the *Chronicle* — this is a mere matter of the Moment — I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death. Even as a Matter of present interest the attempt to crush me in the



## Keats's Letters

*Quarterly* has only brought me more into notice, and it is a common expression among book men, "I wonder the *Quarterly* should cut its own throat."

It does me not the least harm in Society to make me appear little and ridiculous : I know when a man is superior to me and give him all due respect — he will be the last to laugh at me and as for the rest I feel that I make an impression upon them which ensures me personal respect while I am in sight whatever they may say when my back is turned. Poor Haydon's eyes will not suffer him to proceed with his picture — he has been in the Country — I have seen him but once since my return. I hurry matters together here because I do not know when the Mail sails — I shall enquire to-morrow, and then shall know whether to be particular or general in my letter — you shall have at least two sheets a day till it does sail whether it be three days or a fortnight — and then I will begin a fresh one for the next Month. The Miss Reynoldses are very kind to me — but they have lately displeased me much and in this way. Now I am coming the Richardson. On my return the first day I called they were in a sort of taking or bustle about a Cousin<sup>1</sup> of theirs who having fallen out with her Grandpapa in a serious manner was invited by Mrs. R[eynolds] to take Asylum in her house. She is an East Indian and ought to be her Grandfather's Heir. At the time I called Mrs. R. was in conference with her up stairs and the young Ladies were warm in her praises down stairs, calling her genteel, interesting and a thousand other pretty things to which I gave no heed, not being partial to 9 days' wonders. Now all is completely changed — they hate her, and from what I hear she is not without faults — of a real kind : but she has others which are more apt to make women of inferior charms hate her. She is not a Cleopatra, but she is at least a Charmian.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Jane Cox.

## Keats's Letters

She has a rich eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any Man who may address her — from habit she thinks that nothing *particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or on a tremble. I forget myself entirely because I live in her. You will by this time think I am in love with her; so before I go any further I will tell you I am not — she kept me awake one Night as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a pastime and an amusement than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman the very "yes" and "no" of whose Lips is to me a Banquet. I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my Pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her and her like because one has no *sensations* — what we both are is taken for granted. You will suppose I have by this had much talk with her — no such thing — there are the Miss Reynoldses on the look out. They think I don't admire her because I did not stare at her. They call her a flirt to me. What a want of knowledge! She walks across a room in such a Manner that a Man is drawn towards her with a magnetic Power. This they call flirting! they do not know things. They do not know what a Woman is. I believe tho' she has faults — the same as Charmian and Cleopatra might have had. Yet she is a fine thing speaking in a worldly way: for there are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things — the worldly, theatrical and pantomimical; and the unearthly, spiritual and ethereal — in the former Buonaparte, Lord Byron and this Charmian hold the first place in our Minds; in the

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latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and you my dear Sister are the conquering feelings. As a Man in the world I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal Being I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me. Do not think my dear Brother from this that my Passions are headlong or likely to be ever of any pain to you —

“I am free from Men of Pleasure's cares,  
By dint of feelings far more deep than theirs.”

This is Lord Byron, and is one of the finest things he has said. I have no town talk for you, as I have not been much among people — as for Politics they are in my opinion only sleepy because they will soon be too wide awake. Perhaps not — for the long and continued Peace of England itself has given us notions of personal safety which are likely to prevent the re-establishment of our national Honesty. There is, of a truth, nothing manly or sterling in any part of the Government. There are many Madmen in the Country, I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded on Tower Hill merely for the sake of *éclat*; there are many Men like Hunt who from a principle of taste would like to see things go on better, there are many like Sir F. Burdett who like to sit at the head of political dinners, — but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their Country. The motives of our worst men are Interest and of our best Vanity. We have no Milton, no Algernon Sidney — Governors in these days lose the title of Man in exchange for that of Diplomat and Minister. We breathe in a sort of Official Atmosphere. All the departments of Government have strayed far from Simplicity, which is the greatest of strength. There is as much difference in this respect between the present Government and Oliver Cromwell's as there is

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between the 12 Tables of Rome and the volumes of Civil Law which were digested by Justinian. A Man now entitled Chancellor has the same honour paid him whether he be a Hog or a Lord Bacon. No sensation is created by Greatness but by the number of Orders a Man has at his Button holes. Notwithstanding the part which the Liberals take in the Cause of Napoleon I cannot but think he has done more harm to the life of Liberty than any one else could have done : not that the divine right Gentlemen have done or intend to do any good — no, they have taken a Lesson of him, and will do all the further harm he would have done without any of the good. The worst thing he has done is, that he has taught them how to organize their monstrous armies. The Emperor Alexander it is said intends to divide his Empire as did Diocletian — creating two Czars besides himself, and continuing the supreme Monarch of the whole. Should he do this and they for a series of Years keep peaceable among themselves Russia may spread her conquest even to China — I think a very likely thing that China itself may fall. Turkey certainly will. Meanwhile European North Russia will hold its horns against the rest of Europe, intriguing constantly with France. Dilke, whom you know to be a Godwin perfectability Man, pleases himself with the idea that America will be the country to take up the human intellect where England leaves off — I differ there with him greatly. A country like the United States, whose greatest Men are Franklins and Washingtons, will never do that. They are great Men doubtless, but how are they to be compared to those our countrymen Milton and the two Sydneys? The one is a philosophical Quaker full of mean and thrifty maxims, the other sold the very Charger who had taken him through all his Battles. Those Americans are great, but they are not sublime Man — the humanity of the United States can never



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reach the sublime. Birkbeck's mind is too much in the American style—you must endeavour to infuse a little Spirit of another sort into the settlement; always with great caution, for thereby you may do your descendants more good than you may imagine. If I had a prayer to make for any great good, next to Tom's recovery, it should be that one of your Children should be the first American Poet.

This is Friday, I know not what day of the Month—I will enquire to-morrow, for it is fit you should know the time I am writing. I went to Town yesterday, and calling at Mrs. Millar's was told that your Mother would not be found at home—I met Henry as I turned the corner—I had no leisure to return, so I left the letters with him. He was looking very well. Poor Tom is no better to-night—I am afraid to ask him what Message I shall send from him. And here I could go on complaining of my Misery, but I will keep myself cheerful for your Sakes. With a great deal of trouble I have succeeded in getting Fanny to Hampstead. She has been several times. Mr. Lewis has been very kind to Tom all the summer, there has scarce a day passed but he has visited him, and not one day without bringing or sending some fruit of the nicest kind. He has been very assiduous in his enquiries after you. It would give the old Gentleman a great deal of pleasure if you would send him a Sheet enclosed in the next parcel to me, after you receive this—how long it will be first.—Why did I not write to Philadelphia? Really I am sorry for that neglect. I wish to go on writing ad infinitum to you—I wish for interesting matter and a pen as swift as the wind. But the fact is I go so little into the Crowd now that I have nothing fresh and fresh every day to speculate upon except my own Whims and Theories. I have been but once to Haydon's, once to Hunt's, once to Rice's, once to Hessey's. I have not

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seen Taylor, I have not been to the Theatre. Now if I had been many times to all these and was still in the habit of going I could on my return at night have each day something new to tell you of without any stop. But now I have such a dearth that when I get to the end of this sentence and to the bottom of this page I must wait till I can find something interesting to you before I begin another. After all it is not much matter what it may be about, for the very words from such a distance penned by this hand will be grateful to you — even though I were to copy out the tale of Mother Hubbard or Little Red Riding Hood. I have been over to Dilke's this evening — there with Brown we have been talking of different and indifferent Matters — of Euclid, of Metaphysics, of the Bible, of Shakespeare, of the horrid System and consequences of the fagging at great schools. I know not yet how large a parcel I can send — I mean by way of Letters — I hope there can be no objection to my dowling up a quire made into a small compass. That is the manner in which I shall write. I shall send you more than Letters — I mean a tale — which I must begin on account of the activity of my Mind; of its inability to remain at rest. It must be prose and not very exciting. I must do this because in the way I am at present situated I have too many interruptions to a train of feeling to be able to write Poetry. So I shall write this Tale, and if I think it worth while get a duplicate made before I send it off to you.

This is a fresh beginning the 21st October. Charles and Henry were with us on Sunday, and they brought me your Letter to your Mother — we agreed to get a Packet off to you as soon as possible. I shall dine with your Mother to-morrow, when they have promised to have their Letters ready. I shall send as soon as possible without thinking of the little you may have from me in the first parcel, as I intend, as I said before, to

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begin another Letter of more regular information. Here I want to communicate so largely in a little time that I am puzzled where to direct my attention. Haslam has promised to let me know from Capper and Hazlewood. For want of something better I shall proceed to give you some extracts from my Scotch Letters. Yet now I think on it why not send you the letters themselves—I have three of them at present—I believe Haydon has two which I will get in time. I dined with your Mother and Henry at Mrs. Millar's on Thursday, when they gave me their Letters—Charles' I have not yet—he has promised to send it. The thought of sending my Scotch Letters has determined me to enclose a few more which I have received and which will give you the best cue to how I am going on, better than you could otherwise know. Your Mother was well and I was sorry I could not stop later. I called on Hunt yesterday—it has been always my fate to meet Ollier there. On Thursday I walked with Hazlitt as far as covent Garden: he was going to play Rackets. I think Tom has been rather better these few last days—he has been less nervous. I expect Reynolds to-morrow. Since I wrote thus far I have met with that same Lady again, whom I saw at Hastings and whom I met when we were going to the English Opera. It was in a street which goes from Bedford Row to Lamb's Conduit Street.—I passed her and turned back: she seemed glad of it—glad to see me, and not offended at my passing her before. We walked on towards Islington, where we called on a friend of her's who keeps a Boarding School. She has always been an enigma to me—she has been in a Room with you and Reynolds, and wishes we should be acquainted without any of our common acquaintance knowing it. As we went along, sometimes through shabby, sometimes through decent Streets I had my guessing at work, not knowing what it

## Keats's Letters

would be, and prepared to meet any surprise. First it ended at this House at Islington: on parting from which I pressed to attend her home. She consented, and then again my thoughts were at work what it might lead to, tho' now they had received a sort of genteel hint from the Boarding School. Our Walk ended in 34 Gloucester Street, Queen Square—not exactly so, for we went up stairs into her sitting room, a very tasty sort of place with Books, Pictures, a bronze statue of Buonaparte, Music, aeolian Harp; a Parrot, a Linnet, a Case of choice Liqueurs &c. &c. She behaved in the kindest manner—made me take home a Grouse for Tom's dinner. Asked for my address for the purpose of sending more game. As I had warmed with her before and kissed her I thought it would be living backwards not to do so again—she had a better taste: she perceived how much a thing of course it was and shrunk from it—not in a prudish way but in as I say a good taste. She continued to disappoint me in a way which made me feel more pleasure than a simple kiss could do. She said I should please her much more if I would only press her hand and go away. Whether she was in a different disposition when I saw her before—or whether I have in fancy wrong'd her I cannot tell. I expect to pass some pleasant hours with her now and then: in which I feel I shall be of service to her in matters of knowledge and taste: if I can I will. I have no libidinous thought about her—she and your George are the only women *à peu près* de mon age whom I would be content to know for their mind and friendship alone.—I shall in a short time write you as far as I know how I intend to pass my Life—I cannot think of those things now Tom is so unwell and weak. Notwithstanding your Happiness and your recommendation I hope I shall never marry. Though the most beautiful Creature were waiting for me at the end of a



## Keats's Letters

Journey or a Walk; though the Carpet were of Silk, the Curtains of the morning Clouds; the chairs and Sofa stuffed with Cygnet's down; the food Manna, the Wine beyond Claret, the Window opening on Winander mere, I should not feel — or rather my Happiness would not be so fine, as my Solitude is sublime. Then instead of what I have described there is a sublimity to welcome me home. The roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the window pane are my Children. The mighty abstract Idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness — an amiable wife and sweet Children I contemplate as a part of that Beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a King's body-guard — then "Tragedy with sceptered pall comes sweeping by." According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches, or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Troilus, and repeating those lines, "I wander like a lost Soul upon the Stygian Banks staying for waftage," I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone. These things, combined with the opinion I have of the generality of women — who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar Plum than my time, form a barrier against Matrimony which I rejoice in.

I have written this that you might see I have my share of the highest pleasures and that though I may choose to pass my days alone I shall be no Solitary. You see there is nothing spleenical in all this. The only thing that can ever affect me personally for more than one short passing

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day, is any doubt about my powers for poetry—I seldom have any, and I look with hope to the nighting time when I shall have none. I am as happy as a Man can be—that is in myself I should be happy if Tom was well, and I knew you were passing pleasant days. Then I should be most enviable—with the yearning Passion I have for the beautiful, connected and made one with the ambition of my intellect. Think of my Pleasure in Solitude in comparison of my commerce with the world—there I am a child—there they do not know me, not even my most intimate acquaintance—I give in to their feelings as though I were refraining from irritating a little child. Some think me middling, others silly, others foolish—every one thinks he sees my weak side against my will, when in truth it is with my will—I am content to be thought all this because I have in my own breast so great a resource. This is one great reason why they like me so; because they can all show to advantage in a room, and eclipse from a certain tact one who is reckoned to be a good Poet. I hope I am not here playing tricks “to make the angels weep”: I think not: for I have not the least contempt for my species, and though it may sound paradoxical, my greatest elevations of soul leave me every time more humbled.—Enough of this—though in your Love for me you will not think it enough.

Haslam has been here this morning and has taken all the Letters except this sheet, which I shall send him by the Twopenny, as he will put the Parcel in the Boston post Bag by the advice of Capper and Hazlewood, who assure him of the safety and expedition that way—the Parcel will be forwarded to Warder and thence to you all the same. There will not be a Philadelphia ship for these six weeks—by that time I shall have another Letter to you. Mind you I mark this letter A. By the time

## Keats's Letters

you will receive this you will have I trust passed through the greatest of your fatigues. As it was with your Sea Sickness I shall not hear of them till they are past. Do not set to your occupation with too great an anxiety — take it calmly — and let your health be the prime consideration. I hope you will have a Son, and it is one of my first wishes to have him in my Arms — which I will do please God before he cuts one double tooth. Tom is rather more easy than he has been : but is still so nervous that I cannot speak to him of these Matters — indeed it is the care I have had to keep his Mind aloof from feelings too acute that has made this letter so short a one — I did not like to write before him a Letter he knew was to reach your hands — I cannot even now ask him for any Message — his heart speaks to you. Be as happy as you can. Think of me and for my sake be cheerful.

Believe me my dear Brother and Sister

Your anxious and affectionate Brother

JOHN

This day <sup>1</sup> is my Birthday —

All our friends have been anxious in their enquiries and all send their remembrances.

### LVIII.

TO JAMES RICE

Well Walk, 24 November 1818.

MY DEAR RICE: — Your amende Honorable I must call “un surcroit d’Amitié,” for I am not at all sensible of anything but that you were unfortunately engaged and I was unfortunately in a hurry. I completely understand

<sup>1</sup> The 29th of October, 1818.

## Keats's Letters

your feeling in this mistake, and find in it that balance of comfort which remains after regretting your uneasiness. I have long made up my mind to take for granted the genuine-heartedness of my friends, notwithstanding any temporary ambiguousness in their behaviour or their tongues, nothing of which however I had the least scent of this morning. I say completely understand; for I am everlastingly getting my mind into such-like painful trammels — and am even at this moment suffering under them in the case of a friend of ours. — I will tell you two most unfortunate and parallel slips — it seems down-right pre-intention. — A friend says to me, “Keats, I shall go and see Severn this week.” — “Ah! (says I) you want him to take your Portrait.” — And again, “Keats,” says a friend, “when will you come to town again?” — “I will,” says I, “let you have the MS. next week.” In both these cases I appeared to attribute an interested motive to each of my friends’ questions — the first made him flush, the second made him look angry: — and yet I am innocent in both cases; my mind leapt over every interval, to what I saw was per se a pleasant subject with him. You see I have no allowances to make — you see how far I am from supposing you could show me any neglect. I very much regret the long time I have been obliged to exile from you: for I have one or two rather pleasant occasions to confer upon with you. What I have heard from George is favourable — I expect a letter from the Settlement itself.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS.

I cannot give any good news of Tom.



## Keats's Letters

### LIX.

TO FANNY KEATS

Tuesday Morn

[*Postmark*, Hampstead, 1 December 1818.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — Poor Tom<sup>1</sup> has been so bad that I have delayed your visit hither — as it would be so painful to you both. I cannot say he is any better this morning — he is in a very dangerous state — I have scarce any hopes of him. Keep up your spirits for me my dear Fanny — repose entirely in

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN.

### LX.

TO RICHARD WOODHOUSE

Wentworth Place, Hampstead, 18 December, 1818.

MY DEAR WOODHOUSE: — I am greatly obliged to you. I must needs feel flattered by making an impression on a set of ladies. I should be content to do so by meretricious romance verse, if they alone, and not men, were to judge. I should like very much to know those ladies — though look here, Woodhouse — I have a new leaf to turn over: I must work; I must read; I must write. I am unable to afford time for new acquaintances. I am scarcely able to do my duty to those I have. Leave the matter to chance. But do not forget to give my remembrances to your cousin.

Yours most sincerely

JOHN KEATS

<sup>1</sup> He died the same day, and was buried in the Church of St. Stephen, Coleman Street, on the 7th of December, 1818.

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### LXI.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Wentworth Place [24 Dec. 1818].

MY DEAR TAYLOR:— Can you lend me £30 for a short time? Ten I want for myself — and twenty for a friend — which will be repaid me by the middle of next month. I shall go to Chichester on Wednesday and perhaps stay a fortnight — I am afraid I shall not be able to dine with you before I return. Remember me to Woodhouse.

Yours sincerely

JOHN KEATS.

### LXII.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Wentworth Place [January 1819].

MY DEAR HAYDON:— We are very unlucky — I should have stopped to dine with you, but I knew I should not have been able to leave you in time for my plaguy sore throat; which is getting well.

I shall have a little trouble in procuring the Money and a great ordeal to go through — no trouble indeed to any one else — or ordeal either. I mean I shall have to go to town some thrice, and stand in the Bank an hour or two — to me worse than any thing in Dante — I should have less chance with the people around me than Orpheus had with the Stones. I have been writing a little now and then lately: but nothing to speak of — being discontented and as it were moulting. Yet I do not think I shall ever

## Keats's Letters

come to the rope or the Pistol, for after a day or two's melancholy, although I smoke more and more my own insufficiency — I see by little and little more of what is to be done, and how it is to be done, should I ever be able to do it. On my soul, there should be some reward for that continual "agonie ennuyeuse." I was thinking of going into Hampshire for a few days. I have been delaying it longer than I intended. You shall see me soon; and do not be at all anxious, for *this* time I really will do, what I never did before in my life, business in good time, and properly. — With respect to the Bond — it may be a satisfaction to you to let me have it: but as you love me do not let there be any mention of interest, although we are mortal men — and bind ourselves for fear of death.

Your's for ever

JOHN KEATS —

### LXIII.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Wentworth Place [January 1819].

MY DEAR HAYDON: — My throat has not suffered me yet to expose myself to the night air: however I have been to town in the day time — have had several interviews with my guardian — have written him rather a plain-spoken Letter — which has had its effect; and he now seems inclined to put no stumbling block in my way: so that I see a good prospect of performing my promise. What I should have lent you ere this if I could have got it, was belonging to poor Tom — and the difficulty is whether I am to inherit it before my Sister is of age; a period of six years. Should it be so I must incontinently take to Corderoy Trowsers. But I am nearly confident 'tis all a

## Keats's Letters

Bam. I shall see you soon — but do let me have a line to-day or to-morrow concerning your health and spirits.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS.

### LXIV.

TO CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE AND MRS. DILKE

From Charles Armitage Brown and Keats<sup>1</sup>

Bedhampton, 24 January 1819.

DEAR DILKE : — This letter is for your Wife, and if you are a Gentleman, you will deliver it to her, without reading one word further. *'read thou Squire.* There is a wager depending on this.

MY CHARMING DEAR MRS. DILKE : — It was delightful to receive a letter from you, — but such a letter ! what presumption in me to attempt to answer it ! Where shall I find, in my poor brain, such gibes, such jeers, such flashes of merriment ? Alas ! you will say, as you read me, Alas ! poor Brown ! quite chop fallen ! But that's not true ; my chops have been beautifully plumped out since I came here : my dinners have been good & nourishing, & my inside never washed by a red herring broth. Then my mind has been so happy ! I have been smiled on by the fair ones, the Lacy's, the Prices, & the Mullings's, but not by the Richards's ; Old Dicky has not called here during my visit, — I have not seen him ; the whole of the family are shuffling to carriage folks for acquaintances, cutting their old friends, and dealing out pride & folly, while we allow they have got the odd trick, but dispute

<sup>1</sup> Of this joint composition Keats's portion is printed in italic — Brown's portion in Roman.



## Keats's Letters

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their honours. I was determined to be beforehand with them, & behaved cavalierly & neglectingly to the family, & passed the girls in Havant with a slight bow. — Keats is much better, owing to a strict forbearance from a third glass of wine. He & I walked from Chichester yesterday, we were here at 3, but the Dinner was finished; a brace of Muir fowl had been dressed; I ate a piece of the breast cold, & it was not tainted; I dared not venture further. Mr. Snook was nearly turned sick by being merely asked to take a mouthful. The other brace was so high, that the cook declined preparing them for the spit, & they were thrown away. I see your husband declared them to be in excellent order; I supposed he enjoyed them in a disgusting manner, — sucking the rotten flesh off the bones, & crunching the putrid bones. Did you eat any? I hope not, for an ooman should be delicate in her food. — O you Jezabel! to sit quietly in your room, while the thieves were ransacking my house! No doubt poor Ann's throat was cut; has the Coroner sat on her yet? — Mrs. Snook says she knows how to hold a pen very well, & wants no lessons from me; only think of the vanity of the ooman! She tells me to make honourable mention of your letter which she received at Breakfast time, but how can I do so? I have not read it; & I'll lay my life it is not a tenth part so good as mine, — pshaw on your letter to her! — On Tuesday night I think you'll see me. In the mean time I'll not say a word about spasms in the way of my profession, tho' as your friend I must profess myself very sorry. Keats & I are going to call on Mr. Butler & Mr. Burton this morning, & to-morrow we shall go to Sanstead to see Mr. Way's Chapel consecrated by the two Big-wigs of Gloucester & St. Davids. If that vile Carver & Gilder does not do me justice, I'll annoy him all his life with legal expences at every quarter, if my rent is not sent to the day, & that will not be revenge enough for the

## Keats's Letters

trouble & confusion he has put me to. — Mrs. Dilke is remarkably well for Mrs. Dilke<sup>1</sup> in winter. — Have you heard any thing of John Blagden; he is off! want of business has made him play the fool, — I am sorry — *that Brown and you are getting so very witty — my modest feathered Pen frizzles like baby roast beef at making its entrance among such tantrum sentences — or rather ten senses. Brown super or supper sir named the Sleet has been getting thinner a little by pining opposite Miss Muggins — (Brown says Mullins but I beg leave to differ from him) — we sit it out till ten o' Clock — Miss M. has persuaded Brown to shave his whiskers — he came down to Breakfast like the sign of the full Moon — his Profile is quite alter'd. He looks more like an oman than I ever could think it possible — and on putting on Mrs. D's Calash the deception was complete especially as his voice is trebled by making love in the draught of a doorway. I too am metamorphosed — a young oman here in Bed — hampton has over persuaded me to wear my shirt collar up to my eyes. Mrs. Snook I catch smoaking it every now and then and I believe Brown does but I cannot now look sideways. Brown wants to scribble more so I will finish with a marginal note — Viz. Remember me to Wentworth Place and Elm Cottage — not forgetting Millamant —*

*Your's if possible  
J. Keats —*

This is abominable! I did but go up stairs to put on a clean & starched handkerchief, & that overweening rogue read my letter & scrawled over one of my sheets, and given him a counterpain, — I wish I could blank-it

all over and beat him with a <sup>k</sup> { certain rod, & have a fresh one bolstered up, Ah! he may dress me as he

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Dilke, of Chichester, the mother of Keats's friend.

## Keats's Letters

*likes but he shan't tic { k            be } low the feathers,— I  
would not give a tester for such puns, let us ope brown  
(erratum — a large B — a Bumble B.) will go no further in  
the Bedroom & not call Mat Snook a relation to Mattrass —  
This is grown to a conclusion — I had excellent puns in my  
head but one bad one from Brown has quite upset me but I am  
quite set-up for more, but I'm content to be conqueror.*

Your's in love.

CHAS. BROWN.

*N. B. I beg leaf [sic] to withdraw all my Puns — they  
are all wash, an base uns.*

### LXV.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place — Feby. [1819]. Thursday

MY DEAR FANNY : — Your Letter to me at Bedhampton hurt me very much, — What objection can there be to your receiving a Letter from me ? At Bedhampton I was unwell and did not go out of the Garden Gate but twice or thrice during the fortnight I was there — Since I came back I have been taking care of myself — I have been obliged to do so, and am now in hopes that by this care I shall get rid of a sore throat which has haunted me at intervals nearly a twelvemonth. I had always a presentiment of not being able to succeed in persuading Mr. Abbey to let you remain longer at School — I am very sorry that he will not consent. I recommend you to keep up all that you know and to learn more by yourself however little. The time will come when you will be more pleased with Life — look forward to that time and, though it may appear a trifle be careful not to let the idle and retired Life, you lead fix any awkward habit or behaviour

## Keats's Letters

on you — whether you sit or walk endeavour to let it be in a seemly and if possible a graceful manner. We have been very little together : but you have not the less been with me in thought. You have no one in the world besides me who would sacrifice any thing for you—I feel myself the only Protector you have. In all your little troubles think of me with the thought that there is at least one person in England who if he could would help you out of them — I live in hopes of being able to make you happy. — I should not perhaps write in this manner, if it were not for the fear of not being able to see you often or long together. I am in hopes Mr. Abbey will not object any more to your receiving a letter now and then from me. How unreasonable ! I want a few more lines from you for George — there are some young Men, acquaintances of a Schoolfellow of mine, going out to Birkbeck's at the latter end of this Month — I am in expectation every day of hearing from George — I begin to fear his last letters miscarried. I shall be in town to-morrow — if you should not be in town, I shall send this little parcel by the Walthamstow Coach — I think you will like Goldsmith — Write me soon —

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

Mrs. Dilke has not been very well — she is gone a walk to town to-day for exercise.

### LXVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Saturday Morn—  
[*Postmark*, 27 February 1819].

MY DEAR FANNY : — I intended to have not failed to do as you requested, and write you as you say once a fort-



## Keats's Letters

night. On looking to your letter I find there is no date; and not knowing how long it is since I received it I do not precisely know how great a sinner I am. I am getting quite well, and Mrs. Dilke is getting on pretty well. You must pay no attention to Mrs. Abbey's unfeeling and ignorant gabble. You can't stop an old woman's crying more than you can a Child's. The old woman is the greatest nuisance because she is too old for the rod. Many people live opposite a Blacksmith's till they cannot hear the hammer. I have been in Town for two or three days and came back last night. I have been a little concerned at not hearing from George — I continue in daily expectation. Keep on reading and play as much on the music and the grassplot as you can. I should like to take possession of those Grassplots for a Month or so; and send Mrs. A. to Town to count coffee berries instead of currant Bunches, for I want you to teach me a few common dancing steps — and I would buy a Watch box to practise them in by myself. I think I had better always pay the postage of these Letters. I shall send you another book the first time I am in Town early enough to book it with one of the morning Walthamstow Coaches. You did not say a word about your Chilblains. Write me directly and let me know about them — Your Letter shall be answered like an echo.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

LXVII.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Wentworth Place.

[*Postmark*, 8 March 1819.]

MY DEAR HAYDON: — You must be wondering where I am and what I am about! I am mostly at Hampstead,

## Keats's Letters

and about nothing; being in a sort of *qui bono temper*, not exactly on the road to an epic poem. Nor must you think I have forgotten you. No, I have about every three days been to Abbey's and to the Law[y]ers. Do let me know how you have been getting on, and in what spirits you are.

You got out gloriously in yesterday's *Examiner*. What a set of little people we live amongst! I went the other day into an ironmonger's shop — without any change in my sensations — men and tin kettles are much the same in these days — they do not study like children at five and thirty — but they talk like men of twenty. Conversation is not a search after knowledge, but an endeavour at effect.

In this respect two most opposite men, Wordsworth and Hunt, are the same. A friend of mine observed the other day that if Lord Bacon were to make any remark in a party of the present day, the conversation would stop on the sudden. I am convinced of this, and from this I have come to this resolution — never to write for the sake of writing or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge or experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me; otherwise I will be dumb. What imagination I have I shall enjoy, and greatly, for I have experienced the satisfaction of having great conceptions without the trouble of sonnetteering. I will not spoil my love of gloom by writing an Ode to Darkness!

With respect to my livelihood, I will not write for it, — for I will not run with that most vulgar of all crowds, the literary. Such things I ratify by looking upon myself, and trying myself at lifting mental weights, as it were. I am three and twenty, with little knowledge and middling intellect. It is true that in the height of enthusiasm I have been cheated into some fine passages; but that is not the thing.

## Keats's Letters

I have not been to see you because all my going out has been to town, and that has been a great deal. Write soon.

Yours constantly,

JOHN KEATS

### LXVIII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, March 13th [1819].

MY DEAR FANNY:—I have been employed lately in writing to George—I do not send him very short letters, but keep on day after day. There were some young Men I think I told you of who were going to the Settlement: they have changed their minds, and I am disappointed in my expectation of sending Letters by them.—I went lately to the only dance I have been to these twelve months or shall go to for twelve months again—it was to our Brother in laws' cousin's—She gave a dance for her Birthday and I went for the sake of Mrs. Wylie. I am waiting every day to hear from George—I trust there is no harm in the silence: other people are in the same expectation as we are. On looking at your seal I cannot tell whether it is done or not with a Tassie<sup>1</sup>—it seems to me to be paste. As I went through Leicester Square lately I was going to call and buy you some, but not knowing but you might have some I would not run the chance of buying duplicates. Tell me if you have any or if you would like any—and whether you would rather have motto ones like that with which I seal this letter; or heads of great Men such as Shakspeare, Milton &c.—or fancy pieces of Art; such as Fame, Adonis &c.—those

<sup>1</sup> Tassie's imitation gems were very popular in Keats's set.

## Keats's Letters

gentry you read of at the end of the English Dictionary. Tell me also if you want any particular Book; or Pencils, or drawing paper—anything but live stock. Though I will not now be very severe on it, remembering how fond I used to be of Goldfinches, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock salmon and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks: but verily they are better in the Trees and the water—though I must confess even now a partiality for a handsome Globe of gold-fish—then I would have it hold 10 pails of water and be fed continually fresh through a cool pipe with another pipe to let through the floor—well ventilated they would preserve all their beautiful silver and Crimson. Then I would put it before a handsome painted window and shade it all round with myrtles and Japonicas. I should like the window to open onto the Lake of Geneva—and there I'd sit and read all day like the picture of somebody reading. The weather now and then begins to feel like spring; and therefore I have begun my walks on the heath again. Mrs. Dilke is getting better than she has been as she has at length taken a Physician's advice. She ever and anon asks after you and always bids me remember her in my Letters to you. She is going to leave Hampstead for the sake of educating their son Charles at the Westminster school. We (Mr. Brown and I) shall leave in the beginning of May; I do not know what I shall do or where be all the next summer. Mrs. Reynolds has had a sick house; but they are all well now. You see what news I can send you I do—we all live one day like the other as well as you do—the only difference is being sick and well—with the variations of single and double knocks, and the story of a dreadful fire in the Newspapers. I mentioned Mr. Brown's name—yet I do not think I ever said a word about him to you. He is a friend of mine of two years standing, with whom I walked through



## Keats's Letters

Scotland: who has been very kind to me in many things when I most wanted his assistance and with whom I keep house till the first of May — you will know him some day. The name of the young Man who came with me is William Haslam. Ever,

Your affectionate Brother,  
JOHN.

### LXIX.

TO JOSEPH SEVERN

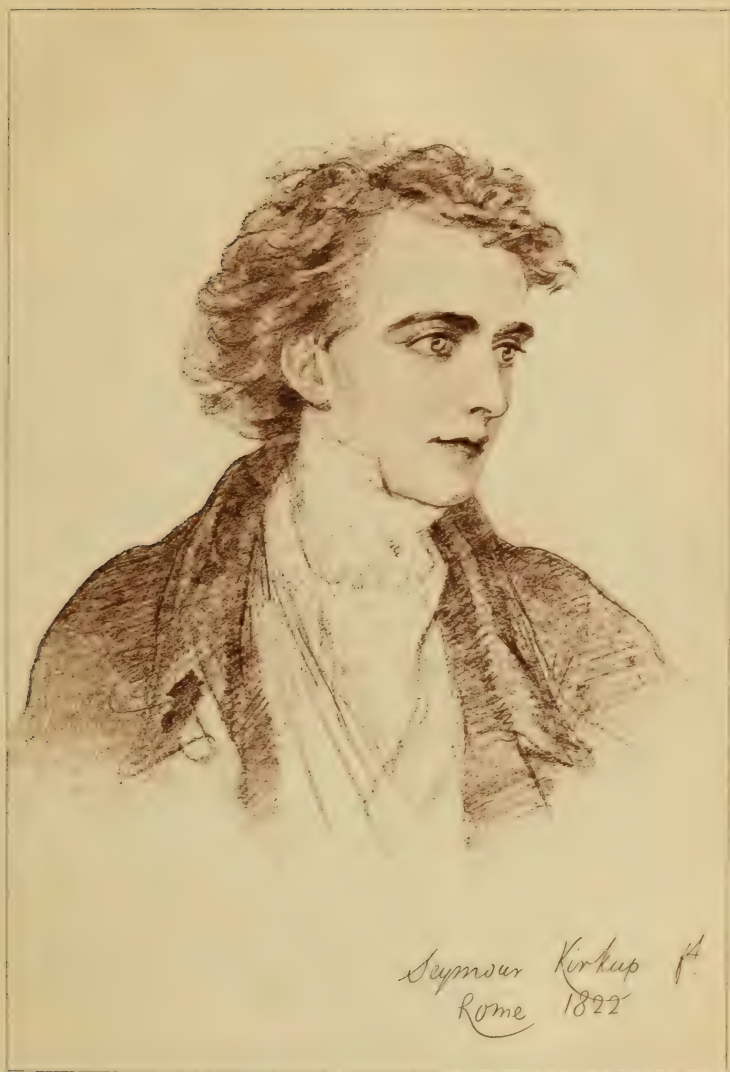
Wentworth Place.

Monday-af. [29 March 1819].

MY DEAR SEVERN: — Your note gave me some pain, not on my own account, but on yours. Of course I should never suffer any petty vanity of mine to hinder you in any wise; and therefore I should say “put the miniature in the exhibition” if only myself was to be hurt. But, will it not hurt you? What good can it do to any future picture. Even a large picture is lost in that canting place — what a drop of water in the ocean is a Miniature. Those who might chance to see it for the most part if they had ever heard of either of us and know what we were and of what years would laugh at the puff of the one and the vanity of the other. I am however in these matters a very bad judge — and would advise you to act in a way that appears to yourself the best for your interest. As your *Hermia* and *Helena* is finished send that without the prologue of a Miniature.<sup>1</sup> I shall see you soon, if you do not pay me a visit sooner — there’s a Bull for you.

Yours ever sincerely  
JOHN KEATS —

<sup>1</sup> Severn’s profession at that time was that of a miniature painter, and, as “*The Cave of Despair*” was only his second attempt at oil-



Seymour Kirkup f.  
Rome 1822



## Keats's Letters

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### LXX.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Tuesday [13 April 1819].

MY DEAR HAYDON : — When I offered you assistance I thought I had it in my hand ; I thought I had nothing to do but to do. The difficulties I met with arose from the alertness and suspicion of Abbey : and especially from the affairs being still in a Lawyer's hand — who has been draining our Property for the last six years of every charge he could make. I cannot do two things at once, and thus this affair has stopped my pursuits in every way — from the first prospect I had of difficulty. I assure you I have harassed myself ten times more than if I alone had been concerned in so much gain or loss. I have also ever told you the exact particulars as well as and as literally as any hopes or fear could translate them : for it was only by parcels that I found all those petty obstacles which for my own sake should not exist a moment — and yet why not — for from my own imprudence and neglect all my accounts are entirely in my Guardian's Power. This has taught me a Lesson. Hereafter I will be more correct. I find myself possessed of much less than I thought for and now if I had all on the table all I could do would be to take from it a moderate two years subsistence and lend you the rest ; but I cannot say how soon I could become possessed of it. This would be no sacrifice nor any matter worth thinking of — much less than parting as I have more than once done with little sums which might have gradually

painting, it follows that "Hermia and Helena" was his first. It figured in the Academy catalogue as Number 267. The portrait of Keats was Number 940 in the catalogue.



## Keats's Letters

formed a library to my taste. These sums amount together to nearly 200 [£], which I have but a chance of ever being repaid or paid at a very distant period. I am humble enough to put this in writing from the sense I have of your struggling situation and the great desire that you should [do] me the justice to credit me the unostentatious and willing state of my nerves on all such occasions. It has not been my fault. I am doubly hurt at the slightly reproachful tone of your note and at the occasion of it, — for it must be some other disappointment; you seem'd so sure of some important help when I last saw you — now you have maimed me again; I was whole, I had began reading again — when your note came I was engaged in a Book. I dread as much as a Plague the idle fever of two months more without any fruit. I will walk over the first fine day: then see what aspect your affairs have taken, and if they should continue gloomy walk into the City to Abbey and get his consent for I am persuaded that to me alone he will not concede a jot.

### LXXI.

TO FANNY KEATS

[Wentworth Place, Saturday —  
[17 April 1819?]]

MY DEAR FANNY: — If it were but six o'Clock in the morning I would set off to see you to-day: if I should do so now I could not stop long enough for a how d'ye do — it is so long a walk through Hornsey and Tottenham — and as for Stage Coaching it besides that it is very expensive it is like going into the Boxes by the way of the pit. I cannot go out on Sunday — but if on Monday it should promise as fair as to-day I will put on a pair of loose easy

## Keats's Letters

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palatable boots and me rendre chez vous. I continue increasing my letter to George to send it by one of Birkbeck's sons who is going out soon — so if you will let me have a few more lines, they will be in time. I am glad you got on so well with Mons<sup>r</sup>. le Curé. Is he a nice clergyman? — a great deal depends upon a cock'd hat and powder — not gunpowder, lord love us, but lady-meal, violet-smooth, dainty-scented, lilly-white, feather-soft, wigsby-dressing, coat-collar-spoiling, whisker-reaching, pig-tail-loving, swans-down-puffing, parson-sweetening powder. I shall call in passing at the Tottenham nursery and see if I can find some seasonable plants for you. That is the nearest place — or by our la'kin or lady kin, that is by the virgin Mary's kindred, is there not a twig-manufacturer in Walthamstow? Mr. and Mrs. Dilke are coming to dine with us to-day. They will enjoy the country after Westminster. O there is nothing like fine weather, and health, and Books, and a fine country, and a contented Mind, and diligent habit of reading and thinking, and an amulet against the ennui — and, please heaven, a little claret wine cool out of a cellar a mile deep — with a few or a good many ratafia cakes — a rocky basin to bathe in, a strawberry bed to say your prayers to Flora in, a pad nag to go you ten miles or so; two or three sensible people to chat with; two or three spiteful folkes to spar with; two or three odd fishes to laugh at and two or three numskul[l]s to argue with — instead of using dumb bells on a rainy day —

Good bye I've an appointment — can't  
stop pon word — good bye — now  
dont get up — open the door my-  
self — good bye — see ye Mon-  
day.

J. K.

## Keats's Letters

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LXXII.

TO MISS JEFFREY

C. Brown Esq<sup>re</sup>'s  
Wentworth Place — Hampstead —  
[*Postmark*, 31 May 1819.]

MY DEAR LADY:—I was making a day or two ago a general conflagration of all old Letters and Memorandums, which had become of no interest to me—I made however, like the Barber-inquisitor in *Don Quixote* some reservations—among the rest your and your Sister's Letters. I assure you you had not entirely vanished from my Mind, or even become shadows in my remembrance: it only needed such a memento as your Letters to bring you back to me. Why have I not written before? Why did I not answer your Honiton Letter? I had no good news for you—every concern of ours, (ours I wish I could say) and still I must say *ours*—though George is in America and I have no Brother left. Though in the midst of my troubles I had no relation except my young sister—I have had excellent friends. Mr B. at whose house I now am, invited me,—I have been with him ever since. I could not make up my mind to let you know these things. Nor should I now—but see what a little interest will do—I want you to do me a Favor; which I will first ask and then tell you the reasons. Enquire in the Villages round Teignmouth if there is any Lodging commodious for its cheapness; and let me know where it is and what price. I have the choice as it were of two Poisons (yet I ought not to call this a Poison) the one is voyaging to and from India for a few years; the other is leading a fevrous life

## Keats's Letters

alone with Poetry — this latter will suit me best; for I cannot resolve to give up my Studies.

It strikes me it would not be quite so proper for you to make such inquiries — so give my love to your Mother and ask her to do it. Yes, I would rather conquer my indolence and strain my nerves at some grand Poem — than be in a dunderheaded indiaman. Pray let no one in Teignmouth know any thing of this. Fanny must by this time have altered her name — perhaps you have also — are you all alive? Give my Compts to Mrs ——— your Sister. I have had good news, (tho' 'tis a queerish world in which such things are call'd good) from George — he and his wife are well. I will tell you more soon. Especially don't let the Newfoundland fishermen know it — and especially no one else. I have been always till now almost as careless of the world as a fly — my troubles were all of the Imagination — My Brother George always stood between me and any dealings with the world. Now I find I must buffet it — I must take my stand upon some vantage ground and begin to fight — I must choose between despair and Energy — I choose the latter — though the world has taken on a quakerish look with me, which I once thought was impossible —

“ Nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendour in the grass and glory in the flower.”

I once thought this a Melancholist's dream —

But why do I speak to you in this manner? No believe me I do not write for a mere selfish purpose — the manner in which I have written of myself will convince you. I do not do so to Strangers. I have not quite made up my mind. Write me on the receipt of this — and again at your Leisure; between whiles you shall hear from me again —

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS



## Keats's Letters

### LXXIII.

TO MISS JEFFREY

Wentworth Place,

[*Postmark*, 9 June 1819.]

MY DEAR YOUNG LADY:—I am exceedingly obliged by your two letters—Why I did not answer your first immediately was that I have had a little aversion to the South of Devon from the continual remembrance of my Brother Tom. On that account I do not return to my old Lodgings in Hampstead though the people of the house have become friends of mine—This however I could think nothing of, it can do no more than keep one's thoughts employed for a day or two. I like your description of Bradley very much and I dare say shall be there in the course of the summer; it would be immediately but that a friend with ill health and to whom I am greatly attached call'd on me yesterday and proposed my spending a Month with him at the back of the Isle of Wight. This is just the thing at present—the morrow will take care of itself—I do not like the name of Bishop's Teigntown—I hope the road from Teignmouth to Bradley does not lie that way—Your advice about the Indiaman is a very wise advice, because it just suits me, though you are a little in the wrong concerning its destroying the energies of Mind: on the contrary it would be the finest thing in the world to strengthen them—To be thrown among people who care not for you, with whom you have no sympathies forces the Mind upon its own resources, and leaves it free to make its speculations of the differences of human character and to class them with the calmness of a Botanist. An Indiaman is a little world. One of the great reasons

## Keats's Letters

that the English have produced the finest writers in the world is, that the English world has ill-treated them during their lives and foster'd them after their deaths. They have in general been trampled aside into the bye paths of life and seen the festerings of Society. They have not been treated like the Raphaels of Italy. And where is the Englishman and Poet who has given a magnificent Entertainment at the christening of one of his Hero's Horses as Boyardo did? He had a Castle in the Appenine. He was a noble Poet of Romance; not a miserable and mighty Poet of the human Heart. The middle age of Shakspeare was all c[l]ouded over; his days were not more happy than Hamlet's who is perhaps more like Shakspeare himself in his common every day Life than any other of his Characters — Ben Johnson [*sic*] was a common Soldier and in the Low countries, in the face of two armies, fought a single combat with a french Trooper and slew him — For all this I will not go on board an Indiaman, nor for example's sake run my head into dark alleys: I dare say my discipline is to come, and plenty of it too. I have been very idle lately, very averse to writing; both from the overpowering idea of our dead poets and from abatement of my love of fame. I hope I am a little more of a Philosopher than I was, consequently a little less of a versifying Pet-lamb. I have put no more in Print or you should have had it. You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an ode to Indolence. Why did you not make your long-haired sister put her great brown hard fist to paper and cross your Letter? Tell her when you write again that I expect chequer-work — My friend Mr. Brown is sitting opposite me employed in writing a Life of David. He reads me passages as he writes them stuffing my infidel mouth as though I were a young rook — Infidel Rooks do

## Keats's Letters

not provender with Elisha's Ravens. If he goes on as he has begun your new Church had better not proceed, for parsons will be superseded [*sic*] — and of course the Clerks must follow. Give my love to your Mother with the assurance that I can never forget her anxiety for my Brother Tom. Believe also that I shall ever remember our leave-taking with *you*.

Ever sincerely yours

JOHN KEATS.

### LXXIV.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place [16 June 1819].

MY DEAR FANNY:—Still I cannot afford to spend money by Coach-hire and still my throat is not well enough to warrant my walking. I went yesterday to ask Mr. Abbey for some money; but I could not on account of a Letter he showed me from my Aunt's solicitor. You do not understand the business. I trust it will not in the end be detrimental to you. I am going to try the Press once more, and to that end shall retire to live cheaply in the country and compose myself and verses as well as I can. I have very good friends ready to help me — and I am the more bound to be careful of the money they lend me. It will all be well in the course of a year I hope. I am confident of it, so do not let it trouble you at all. Mr. Abbey showed me a Letter he had received from George containing the news of the birth of a Niece for us — and all doing well — he said he would take it to you — so I suppose day you will see it. I was preparing to enquire for a situation with an apothecary, but Mr. Brown persuades me to try the press once more; so I will

## Keats's Letters

with all my industry and ability. Mr. Rice a friend of mine in ill health has proposed ret[i]ring to the back of the Isle of Wight — which I hope will be cheap in the summer — I am sure it will in the winter. Thence you shall frequently hear from me and in the Letters I will copy those lines I may write which will be most pleasing to you in the confidence you will show them to no one. I have not run quite aground yet I hope, having written this morning to several people to whom I have lent money requesting repayment. I shall henceforth shake off my indolent fits, and among other reformation be more diligent in writing to you, and mind you always answer me. I shall be obliged to go out of town on Saturday and shall have no money till to-morrow, so I am very sorry to think I shall not be able to come to Walthamstow. The Head Mr. Severn did of me is now too dear, but here inclosed is a very capital Profile done by Mr. Brown. I will write again on Monday or Tuesday — Mr. and Mrs. Dilke are well.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

LXXV.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Wentworth Place

Thursday Morning [17 June 1819].

MY DEAR HAYDON: — I know you will not be prepared for this, because your Pocket must needs be very low having been at ebb tide so long: but what can I do? mine is lower. I was the day before yesterday much in want of Money: but some news I had yesterday has driven me into necessity. I went to Abbey's for some Cash, and he put into my hand a letter from my Aunt's



## Keats's Letters

Solicitor containing the pleasant information that she was about to file a Bill in Chancery against us. Now in case of a defeat Abbey will be very undeservedly in the wrong box; so I could not ask him for any more money, nor can I till the affair is decided; and if it goes against him I must in conscience make over to him what little he may have remaining. My purpose is now to make one more attempt in the Press — if that fail, “ye hear no more of me” as Chaucer says. Brown has lent me some money for the present. Do borrow or beg some how what you can for me. Do not suppose I am at all uncomfortable about the matter in any other way than as it forces me to apply to the needy. I could not send you those lines, for I could not get the only copy of them before last Saturday evening. I sent them Mr. Elmes on Monday. I saw Monkhouse on Sunday — he told me you were getting on with the Picture. I would have come over to you to-day, but I am fully employed —

Yours ever sincerely  
JOHN KEATS —

### LXXVI.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Shanklin,  
Isle of Wight, Thursday [1 July 1819].  
[*Postmark*, Newport, 3 July 1819].

MY DEAREST LADY: — I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night — ’twas too much like one out of Rousseau’s Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, ummusical

## Keats's Letters

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Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rhapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should [think me] either too unhappy or perhaps a little mad. I am now at a very pleasant Cottage window, looking onto a beautiful hilly country, with a glimpse of the sea; the morning is very fine. I do not know how elastic my spirit might be, what pleasure I might have in living here and breathing and wandering as free as a stag about this beautiful Coast if the remembrance of you did not so weigh upon me. I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours — and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom. Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in it — make it rich as a draught of poppies to intoxicate me — write the softest words and kiss them that I may at least touch my lips where yours have been. For myself I know not how to express my devotion to so fair a form: I want a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair. I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days — three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain. But however selfish I may feel, I am sure I could never act selfishly: as I told you a day or two before I left Hampstead, I will never return to London if my Fate does not turn up Pam or at least a Court-card. Though I could centre my Happiness in you, I cannot expect to engross your heart so entirely — indeed if I thought you felt as much for me as I do for

## Keats's Letters

you at this moment I do not think I could restrain myself from seeing you again to-morrow for the delight of one embrace. But no — I must live upon hope and Chance. In case of the worst that can happen, I shall still love you — but what hatred shall I have for another! Some lines I read the other day are continually ringing a peal in my ears :

“To see those eyes I prize above mine own  
Darts favors on another —  
And those sweet lips (yielding immortal nectar)  
Be gently press'd by any but myself —  
Think, think Francesca, what a cursed thing  
It were beyond expression!”

Do write immediately. There is no Post from this Place, so you must address Post Office, Newport, Isle of Wight. I know before night I shall curse myself for having sent you so cold a Letter; yet it is better to do it as much in my senses as possible. Be as kind as the distance will permit to your

KEATS.

Present my Compliments to your mother, my love to Margaret and best remembrances to your Brother — if you please so.

## LXXVII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

July 8th.

[*Postmark*, Newport, 10 July 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL: — Your Letter gave me more delight than any thing in the world but yourself could do; indeed

## Keats's Letters

I am almost astonished that any absent one should have that luxurious power over my senses which I feel. Even when I am not thinking of you I receive your influence and a tenderer nature stealing upon me. All my thoughts, my unhappiest days and nights, have I find not at all cured me of my love of Beauty, but made it so intense that I am miserable that you are not with me: or rather breathe in that dull sort of patience that cannot be called Life. I never knew before, what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fancy was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up. But if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 'twill not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures. You mention "horrid people" and ask me whether it depend upon them whether I see you again. Do understand me, my love, in this. I have so much of you in my heart that I must turn Mentor when I see a chance of harm befalling you. I would never see any thing but Pleasure in your eyes, love on your lips, and Happiness in your steps. I would wish to see you among those amusements suitable to your inclinations and spirits; so that our loves might be a delight in the midst of Pleasures agreeable enough, rather than a resource from vexations and cares. But I doubt much, in case of the worst, whether I shall be philosopher enough to follow my own Lessons: if I saw my resolution give you a pain I could not. Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could never have lov'd you? — I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others: but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its



## Keats's Letters

Power. You say you are afraid I shall think you do not love me — in saying this you make me ache the more to be near you. I am at the diligent use of my faculties here, I do not pass a day without sprawling some blank verse or tagging some rhymes; and here I must confess, that (since I am on that subject) I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and for nothing else. I have met with women whom I really think would like to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel. I have seen your Comet, and only wish it was a sign that poor Rice would get well whose illness makes him rather a melancholy companion: and the more so as to conquer his feelings and hide them from me, with a forc'd Pun. I kiss'd your writing over in the hope you had indulg'd me by leaving a trace of honey. What was your dream? Tell it me and I will tell you the interpretation thereof.

Ever yours, my love!

JOHN KEATS

Do not accuse me of delay — we have not here an opportunity of sending letters every day. Write speedily.

### LXXVIII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Shanklin, 12 July 1819.

You will be glad to hear, under my own hand (though Rice says we are like Sauntering Jack and Idle Joe), how diligent I have been, and am being. I have finished the Act,<sup>1</sup> and in the interval of beginning the 2d have proceeded pretty well with Lamia, finishing the 1st part,

<sup>1</sup> Act i. of "Otho the Great."

## Keats's Letters

which consists of about four hundred lines. . . . I have great hopes of success, because I make use of my judgment more deliberately than I have yet done; but in case of failure with the world, I shall find my content. And here (as I know you have my good at heart as much as a Brother), I can only repeat to you what I have said to George — that however I should like to enjoy what the competencies of life procure, I am in no wise dashed at a different prospect. I have spent too many thoughtful days and moralized through too many nights for that, and fruitless would they be indeed, if they did not by degrees make me look upon the affairs of the world with a healthy deliberation. I have of late been moulting: not for fresh feathers and wings: they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of patient sublunary legs. I have altered, not from a Chrysalis into a butterfly, but the contrary; having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world: and that world on our coming here I almost forgot. The first time I sat down to write, I could scarcely believe in the necessity for so doing. It struck me as a great oddity. Yet the very corn which is now so beautiful, as if it had only took to ripening yesterday, is for the market; so, why should I be delicate?

### LXXIX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Shanklin Thursday Evening

[15 July 1819?]

MY LOVE:—I have been in so irritable a state of health these two or three last days, that I did not think I should be able to write this week. Not that I was so ill, but so much so as only to be capable of an unhealthy

## Keats's Letters

teasing letter. To night I am greatly recovered only to feel the languor I have felt after you touched with ardency. You say you perhaps might have made me better: you would then have made me worse: now you could quite effect a cure: What fee my sweet Physician would I not give you to do so. Do not call it folly, when I tell you I took your letter last night to bed with me. In the morning I found your name on the sealing wax obliterated. I was startled at the bad omen till I recollected that it must have happened in my dreams, and they you know fall out by contraries. You must have found out by this time I am a little given to bode ill like the raven; it is my misfortune not my fault; it has proceeded from the general tenor of the circumstances of my life, and rendered every event suspicious. However I will no more trouble either you or myself with sad Prophecies; though so far I am pleased at it as it has given me opportunity to love your disinterestedness towards me. I can be a raven no more; you and pleasure take possession of me at the same moment. I am afraid you have been unwell. If through me illness have touched you (but it must be with a very gentle hand) I must be selfish enough to feel a little glad at it. Will you forgive me this? I have been reading lately an oriental tale of a very beautiful color — It is of a city of melancholy men, all made so by this circumstance. Through a series of adventures each one of them by turns reach some gardens of Paradise where they meet with a most enchanting Lady; and just as they are going to embrace her, she bids them shut their eyes — they shut them — and on opening their eyes again find themselves descending to the earth in a magic basket. The remembrance of this Lady and their delights lost beyond all recovery render them melancholy ever after. How I applied this to you, my dear; how I palpitated at it; how the certainty that you were in the same world with myself,

## Keats's Letters

and though as beautiful, not so talismanic as that Lady; how I could not bear you should be so you must believe because I swear it by yourself. I cannot say when I shall get a volume ready. I have three or four stories half done, but as I cannot write for the mere sake of the press, I am obliged to let them progress or lie still as my fancy chooses. By Christmas perhaps they may appear, but I am not yet sure they ever will. 'Twill be no matter, for Poems are as common as newspapers and I do not see why it is a greater crime in me than in another to let the verses of an half-fledged brain tumble into the reading-rooms and drawing-room windows. Rice has been better lately than usual: he is not suffering from any neglect of his parents who have for some years been able to appreciate him better than they did in his first youth, and are now devoted to his comfort. To-morrow I shall, if my health continues to improve during the night, take a look farther about the country, and spy at the parties about here who come hunting after the picturesque like beagles. It is astonishing how they raven down scenery like children do sweetmeats. The wondrous Chine here is a very great Lion: I wish I had as many guineas as there have been spy-glasses in it.

I have been, I cannot tell why, in capital spirits this last hour. What reason? When I have to take my candle and retire to a lonely room, without the thought as I fall asleep, of seeing you to-morrow morning? or the next day, or the next — it takes on the appearance of impossibility and eternity — I will say a month — I will say I will see you in a month at most, though no one but yourself should see me; if it be but for an hour. I should not like to be so near you as London without being continually with you: after having once more kissed you Sweet I would rather be here alone at my task than in the bustle and hateful literary chitchat. Meantime you must write to me



## Keats's Letters

— as I will every week — for your letters keep me alive.  
My sweet Girl I cannot speak my love for you. Good  
night! and

Ever yours

JOHN KEATS

LXXX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Sunday Night [25 July 1819].

[*Postmark*, 27 July 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL:— I hope you did not blame me much for not obeying your request of a Letter on Saturday: we have had four in our small room playing at cards night and morning leaving me no undisturb'd opportunity to write. Now Rice and Martin are gone I am at liberty. Brown to my sorrow confirms the account you give of your ill health. You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour—— for what is in the world? I say you cannot conceive; it is impossible you should look with such eyes upon me as I have upon you: it cannot be. Forgive me if I wander a little this evening, for I have been all day employ'd in a very abstract Poem and I am in deep love with you—two things which must excuse me. I have, believe me, not been an age in letting you take possession of me; the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal; but burnt the Letter as the very next time I saw you I thought you manifested some dislike to me. If you should ever feel for Man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost. Yet I should not quarrel with you, but hate myself if such a thing were to happen—only I should burst if the thing were not as fine as a Man as you are as a Woman. Perhaps I am too vehement, then fancy me

## Keats's Letters

on my knees, especially when I mention a part of your Letter which hurt me; you say speaking of Mr. Severn "but you must be satisfied in knowing that I admired you much more than your friend." My dear love, I cannot believe there ever was or ever could be any thing to admire in me especially as far as sight goes—I cannot be admired, I am not a thing to be admired. You are, I love you; all I can bring you is a swooning admiration of your Beauty. I hold that place among Men which snub-nos'd brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among women—they are trash to me—unless I should find one among them with a fire in her heart like the one that burns in mine. You absorb me in spite of myself—you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call'd being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares—yet for you I would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so. I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it. From no others would I take it. I am indeed astonish'd to find myself so careless of all charms but yours—remembering as I do the time when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest with me. What softer words can I find for you after this—what it is I will not read. Nor will I say more here, but in a Postscript answer any thing else you may have mentioned in your Letter in so many words—for I am distracted with a thousand thoughts. I will imagine you Venus to-night and pray, pray, pray to your star like a Heathen.

Your's ever, fair Star,  
JOHN KEATS

## Keats's Letters

My seal is mark'd like a family table cloth with my Mother's initial F for Fanny: put between my Father's initials. You will soon hear from me again. My respectful Comp[limen]ts to your Mother. Tell Margaret I'll send her a reef of best rocks and tell Sam<sup>1</sup> I will give him my light bay hunter if he will tie the Bishop hand and foot and pack him in a hamper and send him down for me to bathe him for his health with a Necklace of good snubby stones about his Neck.

LXXXI.

TO CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE

Shanklin, Saturday Evening  
[*Postmark*, 2 August 1819].

MY DEAR DILKE:—I will not make my diligence an excuse for not writing to you sooner—because I consider idleness a much better plea. A Man in the hurry of business of any sort is expected and ought to be expected to look to every thing—his mind is in a whirl, and what matters it—what whirl? But to require a Letter of a Man lost in idleness is the utmost cruelty; you cut the thread of his existence, you beat, you pummel him, you sell his goods and chattels, you put him in prison; you impale him; you crucify him. If I had not put pen to paper since I saw you this would be to me a *vi et armis* taking up before the Judge; but having got over my darling lounging habits a little, it is with scarcely any pain I come to this dating from Shanklin and D[ea]r Dilke. The Isle of Wight is but so so &c. Rice and I passed rather a dull time of it. I hope he will not repent coming with me. He was unwell, and I was not in very good

<sup>1</sup> Fanny Brawne's brother and young sister.

## Keats's Letters

health: and I am afraid we made each other worse by acting upon each other's spirits. We would grow as melancholy as need be. I confess I cannot bear a sick person in a House, especially alone — it weighs upon me day and night — and more so when perhaps the Case is irretrievable. Indeed I think Rice is in a dangerous state. I have had a Letter from him which speaks favourably of his health at present. Brown and I are pretty well harnessed again to our dog-cart. I mean the Tragedy, which goes on sinkingly. We are thinking of introducing an Elephant, but have not historical reference within reach to determine us as to Otho's Menagerie. When Brown first mentioned this I took it for a joke; however he brings such plausible reasons, and discourses so eloquently on the dramatic effect that I am giving it a serious consideration. The Art of Poetry is not sufficient for us, and if we get on in that as well as we do in painting, we shall by next winter crush the Reviews and the Royal Academy. Indeed if Brown would take a little of my advice, he could not fail to be first pallet[te] of his day. But odd as it may appear, he says plainly that he cannot see any force in my plea of putting skies in the background, and leaving Indian ink out of an ash tree. The other day he was sketching Shanklin Church, and as I saw how the business was going on, I challenged him to a trial of skill — he lent me Pencil and Paper — we keep the Sketches to contend for the Prize at the Gallery. I will not say whose I think best — but really I do not think Brown's done to the top of the Art.

A word or two on the Isle of Wight. I have been no further than Steephill. If I may guess, I should [say] that there is no finer part in the Island than from this Place to Steephill. I do not hesitate to say it is fine. Bonchurch is the best. But I have been so many finer walks, with a back ground of lake and mountain instead



## Keats's Letters

of the sea, that I am not much touch'd with it, though I credit it for all the Surprise I should have felt if it had taken my cockney maidenhead. But I may call myself an old Stager in the picturesque, and unless it be something very large and overpowering, I cannot receive any extraordinary relish.

I am sorry to hear that Charles is so much oppress'd at Westminster, though I am sure it will be the finest touchstone for his Metal in the world. His troubles will grow day by day less, as his age and strength increase. The very first Battle he wins will lift him from the Tribe of Manasseh. I do not know how I should feel were I a Father — but I hope I should strive with all my Power not to let the present trouble me. When your Boy shall be twenty, ask him about his childish troubles and he will have no more memory of them than you have of yours. Brown tells me Mrs. Dilke sets off to-day for Chichester. I am glad — I was going to say she had a fine day — but there has been a great Thunder cloud muttering over Hampshire all day — I hope she is now at supper with a good appetite.

So Reynolds's Piece<sup>1</sup> succeeded — that is all well. Papers have with thanks been duly received. We leave this place on the 13th, and will let you know where we may be a few days after — Brown says he will write when the fit comes on him. If you will stand law expenses I'll beat him into one before his time. When I come to town I shall have a little talk with you about Brown and one Jenny Jacobs. Open daylight! he don't care. I am afraid there will be some more feet for little stockings — [*of Keats' making. (I mean the feet.)*]<sup>2</sup> Brown here tried

<sup>1</sup> "One, Two, Three, Four, Five: by Advertisement," a Musical Entertainment in one Act.

<sup>2</sup> The interpolations printed in italics within brackets are of course by Brown.

## Keats's Letters

at a piece of Wit but it failed him, as you see, though long a brewing. — [*This is a 2<sup>d</sup>. lie.*] Men should never despair — you see he has tried again and succeeded to a miracle. — He wants to try again, but as I have a right to an inside place in my own Letter — I take possession.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS —

### LXXXII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Shanklin, Thursday Night [5 August 1819].

[*Postmark*, Newport, 9 August 1819].

MY DEAR GIRL: — You say you must not have any more such Letters as the last: I'll try that you shall not by running obstinate the other way. Indeed I have not fair play — I am not idle enough for proper downright love-letters — I leave this minute a scene in our Tragedy<sup>1</sup> and see you (think it not blasphemy) through the mist of Plots, speeches, counterplots and counterspeeches. The Lover is madder than I am — I am nothing to him — he has a figure like the Statue of Meleager and double distilled fire in his heart. Thank God for my diligence! were it not for that I should be miserable. I encourage it, and strive not to think of you — but when I have succeeded in doing so all day and as far as midnight, you return, as soon as this artificial excitement goes off, more severely from the fever I am left in. Upon my soul I cannot say what you could like me for. I do not think myself a fright any more than I do Mr. A., Mr. B., and Mr. C. — yet if I were a woman I should not like A. B. C. But enough of this. So you intend to hold me to my promise of seeing you in a short time. I shall keep it

<sup>1</sup> "Otho the Great."

## Keats's Letters

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with as much sorrow as gladness: for I am not one of the Paladins of old who liv'd upon water grass and smiles for years together. What thought would I not give to-night for the gratification of my eyes alone? This day week we shall move to Winchester; for I feel the want of a Library. Brown will leave me there to pay a visit to Mr. Snook at Bedhampton: in his absence I will flit to you and back. I will stay very little while, for as I am in a train of writing now I fear to disturb it — let it have its course bad or good — in it I shall try my own strength and the public pulse. At Winchester I shall get your Letters more readily; and it being a cathedral City I shall have a pleasure always a great one to me when near a Cathedral, of reading them during the service up and down the Aisle.

*Friday Morning* [6 August 1819]. — Just as I had written thus far last night, Brown came down in his morning coat and nightcap, saying he had been refresh'd by a good sleep and was very hungry. I left him eating and went to bed, being too tired to enter into any discussions. You would delight very greatly in the walks about here; the Cliffs, woods, hills, sands, rocks &c. about here. They are however not so fine but I shall give them a hearty good bye to exchange them for my Cathedral. — Yet again I am not so tired of Scenery as to hate Switzerland. We might spend a pleasant year at Berne or Zurich — if it should please Venus to hear my “Beseech thee to hear us O Goddess.” And if she should hear, God forbid we should what people call, *settle* — turn into a pond, a stagnant Lethe — a vile crescent, row or buildings. Better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures. Open my Mouth at the Street door like the Lion's head at Venice to receive hateful cards, letters, messages. Go out and wither at tea parties; freeze at dinners; bake at dances; simmer at

## Keats's Letters

routs. No my love, trust yourself to me and I will find you nobler amusements, fortune favouring. I fear you will not receive this till Sunday or Monday: as the irishman would write do not in the mean while hate me. I long to be off for Winchester, for I begin to dislike the very door-posts here — the names, the pebbles. You ask after my health, not telling me whether you are better. I am quite well. You going out is no proof that you are: how is it? Late hours will do you great harm. What fairing is it? I was alone for a couple of days while Brown went gadding over the country with his ancient knapsack. Now I like his society as well as any Man's, yet regretted his return — it broke in upon me like a Thunderbolt. I had got in a dream among my Books — really luxuriating in a solitude and silence you alone should have disturb'd.

Your ever affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

LXXXIII.

TO BENJAMIN BAILEY

Winchester [15 August 1819].

We removed to Winchester for the convenience of a library, and find it an exceeding pleasant town, enriched with a beautiful Cathedral, and surrounded by a fresh-looking country. We are in tolerably good and cheap lodgings. Within these two months I have written 1500 lines, most of which, besides many more of prior composition, you will probably see by next winter. I have written 2 tales, one from Boccaccio, called the Pot of Basil, and another called St. Agnes's Eve, on a popular superstition, and a 3rd called Lamia (half finished). I have also been writing parts of my "Hyperion," and completed



## Keats's Letters

4 acts of a tragedy. It was the opinion of most of my friends that I should never be able to write a scene. I will endeavour to wipe away the prejudice — I sincerely hope you will be pleased when my labours, since we last saw each other, shall reach you. One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting. Another, to upset the drawling of the blue-stocking literary world — if in the Course of a few years I do these two things, I ought to die content, and my friends should drink a dozen of claret on my tomb. I am convinced more and more every day that (excepting the human friend philosopher), a fine writer is the most genuine being in the world. Shakspeare and the Paradise lost every day become greater wonders to me. I look upon fine phrases like a lover. I was glad to see by a passage of one of Brown's letters, some time ago, from the North that you were in such good spirits. Since that you have been married, and in congratulating you I wish you every continuance of them. Present my respects to Mrs. Bailey. This sounds oddly to me, and I dare say I do it awkwardly enough: but I suppose by this time it is nothing new to you. Brown's remembrances to you. As far as I know, we shall remain at Winchester for a goodish while.

Ever your sincere friend,  
JOHN KEATS.

### LXXXIV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Winchester, August 17th.  
[*Postmark*, 16 August 1819.]

MY DEAR GIRL: — What shall I say for myself? I have been here four days and not yet written you — 'tis

## Keats's Letters

true I have had many teasing letters of business to dismiss — and I have been in the Claws, like a serpent in an Eagle's, of the last act of our Tragedy. This is no excuse; I know it; I do not presume to offer it. I have no right either to ask a speedy answer to let me know how lenient you are — I must remain some days in a Mist — I see you through a Mist: as I daresay you do me by this time. Believe in the first Letters I wrote you: I assure you I felt as I wrote — I could not write so now. The thousand images I have had pass through my brain — my uneasy spirits — my unguess'd fate — all spread as a veil between me and you. Remember I have had no idle leisure to brood over you — 'tis well perhaps I have not. I could not have endured the throng of jealousies that used to haunt me before I had plunged so deeply into imaginary interests. I would fain, as my sails are set, sail on without an interruption for a Brace of Months longer — I am in complete cue — in the fever; and shall in these four Months do an immense deal. This Page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant — I cannot help it — I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-romeo. My Mind is heap'd to the full; stuff'd like a cricket ball — if I strive to fill it more it would burst. I know the generality of women would hate me for this; that I should have so unsoften'd, so hard a Mind as to forget them; forget the brightest realities for the dull imaginations of my own Brain. But I conjure you to give it a fair thinking; and ask yourself whether 'tis not better to explain my feelings to you, than write artificial Passion. — Besides, you would see through it. It would be vain to strive to deceive you. 'Tis harsh, harsh, I know it. My heart seems now made of iron — I could not write a proper answer to an invitation to Idalia. You are my Judge: my forehead is on the ground. You seem offended at a little simple innocent childish playfulness in my last.

## Keats's Letters

I did not seriously mean to say that you were endeavouring to make me keep my promise. I beg your pardon for it. 'Tis but *just* your Pride should take the alarm — *seriously*. You say I may do as I please — I do not think with any conscience I can; my cash resources are for the present stopp'd; I fear for some time. I spend no money, but it increases my debts. I have all my life thought very little of these matters — they seem not to belong to me. It may be a proud sentence; but by Heaven I am as entirely above all matters of interest as the Sun is above the Earth — and though of my own money I should be careless; of my Friends' I must be spare. You see how I go on — like so many strokes of a hammer. I cannot help it — I am impell'd, driven to it. I am not happy enough for silken Phrases, and silver sentences. I can no more use soothing words to you than if I were at this moment engaged in a charge of Cavalry. Then you will say I should not write at all. — Should I not? This Winchester is a fine place: a beautiful Cathedral and many other ancient buildings in the Environs. The little coffin of a room at Shanklin is changed for a large room, where I can promenade at my pleasure — looks out onto a beautiful — blank side of a house. It is strange I should like it better than the view of the sea from our window at Shanklin. I began to hate the very posts there — the voice of the old Lady over the way was getting a great Plague. The Fisherman's face never altered any more than our black teapot — the knob however was knock'd off to my little relief. I am getting a great dislike of the picturesque; and can only relish it over again by seeing you enjoy it. One of the pleasantest things I have seen lately was at Cowes. The Regent in his Yatch (I think they spell it) was anchored opposite — a beautiful vessel — and all the Yachts and boats on the coast were passing and repassing it; and circuiting and tacking about it in every direction

## Keats's Letters

— I never beheld anything so silent, light, and graceful. — As we pass'd over to Southampton, there was nearly an accident. There came by a Boat, well mann'd, with two naval officers at the stern. Our Bow-lines took the top of their little mast and snapped it off close by the board. Had the mast been a little stouter they would have been upset. In so trifling an event I could not help admiring our seamen — neither officer nor man in the whole Boat mov'd a muscle — they scarcely notic'd it even with words. Forgive me for this flint-worded Letter, and believe and see that I cannot think of you without some sort of energy — though *mal à propos*. Even as I leave off it seems to me that a few more moments' thought of you would uncrystallize and dissolve me. I must not give way to it — but turn to my writing again — if I fail I shall die hard. O my love, your lips are growing sweet again to my fancy — I must forget them.

Ever your affectionate

KEATS.

LXXXV.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Winchester, 23 August, 1819.

MY DEAR TAYLOR : — . . . Brown and I have together been engaged (this I should wish to remain secret) on a Tragedy which I have just finished and from which we hope to share moderate profits. . . . I feel every confidence that, if I choose, I may be a popular writer. That I will never be; but for all that I will get a livelihood. I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman. They are both a cloying treacle to the wings of Independence. I shall ever consider them (People) as debtors to me for verses, not myself to them for admiration — which



## Keats's Letters

I can do without. I have of late been indulging my spleen by composing a preface AT them : after all resolving never to write a preface at all. "There are so many verses," would I have said to them, "give so much means for me to buy pleasure with, as a relief to my hours of labour." — You will observe at the end of this, if you put down the letter, "How a solitary life engenders pride and egotism!" True — I know it does : but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than anything else could — so I will indulge it. Just so much as I am humbled by the genius above my grasp am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world. — A drummer-boy who holds out his hand familiarly to a field Marshal, — that drummer-boy with me is the good word and favour of the public. Who could wish to be among the commonplace crowd of the little famous — who are each individually lost in a throng made up of themselves? Is this worth louting or playing the hypocrite for? To beg suffrages for a seat on the benches of a myriad-aristocracy in letters? This is not wise — I am not a wise man. 'Tis pride — I will give you a definition of a proud man. He is a man who has neither Vanity nor Wisdom — one filled with hatreds cannot be vain, neither can he be wise. Pardon me for hammering instead of writing. Remember me to Woodhouse, Hessey, and all in Percy Street,

Ever yours sincerely

JOHN KEATS

LXXXVI.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Winchester, 25 August [1819].

MY DEAR REYNOLDS : — By this post I write to Rice, who will tell you why we have left Shanklin ; and how we

## Keats's Letters

like this place. I have indeed scarcely anything else to say, leading so monotonous a life, except I was to give you a history of sensations, and day-nightmares. You would not find me at all unhappy in it, as all my thoughts and feelings which are of the selfish nature, home speculations, every day continue to make me more iron — I am convinced more and more, every day, that fine writing is, next to fine doing, the top thing in the world; the Paradise Lost becomes a great wonder. The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect, the more does my heart distend with Pride and Obstinacy — I feel it in my power to become a popular writer — I feel it in my power to refuse the poisonous suffrage of a public. My own being which I know to be becomes of more consequence to me than the crowds of Shadows in the shape of men and women that inhabit a kingdom. The soul is a world of itself, and has enough to do in its own home. Those whom I know already, and who have grown as it were a part of myself, I could not do without: but for the rest of mankind, they are as much a dream to me as Milton's Hierarchies. I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organization of heart, and lungs as strong as an ox's, so as to be able to bear unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my life very nearly alone though it should last eighty years. But I feel my body too weak to support me to the height, I am obliged continually to check myself, and be nothing. It would be vain for me to endeavour after a more reasonable manner of writing to you. I have nothing to speak of but myself, and what can I say but what I feel? If you should have any reason to regret this state of excitement in me, I will turn the tide of your feelings in the right Channel, by mentioning that it is the only state for the best sort of Poetry — that is all I care for, all I live for. Forgive me for not filling up

## Keats's Letters

the whole sheet; Letters become so irksome to me, that the next time I leave London I shall petition them all to be spared me. To give me credit for constancy, and at the same time waive letter writing will be the highest indulgence I can think of. Ever your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

LXXXVII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Winchester, 5 September [1819].

MY DEAR TAYLOR: — This morning I received yours of the 2d, and with it a letter from Hessey inclosing a Bank post Bill of £30, an ample sum I assure you — more I had no thought of. — You should not have delayed so long in Fleet St[reet] — leading an inactive life as you did was breathing poison: you will find the country air do more for you than you expect. But it must be proper country air. You must choose a spot. What sort of a place is Retford? You should have a dry, gravelly, barren, elevated country, open to the currents of air, and such a place is generally furnished with the finest springs. The neighbourhood of a rich inclosed fulsome manured arable land, especially in a valley and almost as bad on a flat, would be almost as bad as the smoke of Fleet St[reet]. — Such a place as this was Shanklin, only open to the south-east, and surrounded by hills in every other direction. From this south-east came the damps of the sea; which, having no egress, the air would for days together take on an unhealthy idiosyncrasy altogether enervating and weakening as a city smoke — I felt it very much. Since I have been here at Winchester I have been improving in health — it is not so confined — and there is on one side of the City a dry chalky down, where the air is worth

## Keats's Letters

Sixpence a pint. So if you do not get better at Retford, do not impute it to your own weakness before you have well considered the Nature of the air and soil — especially as Autumn is encroaching — for the Autumn fog over a rich land is like the steam from cabbage water. What makes the great difference between valesmen, flatlandmen and mountaineers? The cultivation of the earth in a great measure. Our health, temperament and disposition, are taken more (notwithstanding the contradiction of the history of Cain and Abel) from the air we breathe, than is generally imagined. See the difference between a Peasant and a Butcher. — I am convinced a great cause of it is the difference of the air they breathe: the one takes *his* mingled with the fume of slaughter, the other from the dank exhalation from the glebe; the teeming damp that comes up from the plough-furrow is of more effect in taming the fierceness of a strong man — more than his labour. Let him be mowing furze upon a mountain, and at the day's end his thoughts will run upon a pick-axe if he ever had handled one; — let him leave the plough, and he will think quietly of his supper. Agriculture is the tamer of men — the steam from the earth is like drinking their Mother's milk — it enervates their nature. This appears a great cause of the imbecility of the Chinese: and if this sort of atmosphere is a mitigation to the energy of a strong man, how much more must it injure a weak one unoccupied, unexercised. For what is the cause of so many men maintaining a good state in Cities, but occupation? An idle man, a man who is not sensitively alive to self-interest in a city cannot continue long in good health. This is easily explained. If you were to walk leisurely through an unwholesome path in the fens, with a little horror of them, you would be sure to have your ague. But let Macbeth cross the same path, with the dagger in the air leading him on, and he would



## Keats's Letters

never have an ague or anything like it. You should give these things a serious consideration. Notts, I believe, is a flat county. You should be on the slope of one of the dry barren hills in Somersetshire. I am convinced there is as harmful air to be breathed in the country as in town. I am greatly obliged to you for your letter. Perhaps, if you had had strength and spirits enough, you would have felt offended by my offering a note of hand, or rather expressed it. However, I am sure you will give me credit for not in anywise mistrusting you; or imagining that you would take advantage of any power I might give you over me. No—it proceeded from my serious resolve not to be a gratuitous borrower, from a great desire to be correct in money matters, to have in my desk the Chronicles of them to refer to, and know my worldly non-estate: besides in case of my death such documents would be but just, if merely as memorials of the friendly turns I had done to me. Had I known of your illness I should not have written in such fiery phrase in my first letter. I hope that shortly you will be able to bear six times as much. Brown likes the tragedy very much: but he is not a fit judge of it, as I have only acted as midwife to his plot; and of course he will be fond of his child. I do not think I can make you any extracts without spoiling the effect of the whole when you come to read it—I hope you will then not think my labour misspent. Since I finished it, I have finished *Lamia*, and am now occupied in revising *St. Agnes's Eve*, and studying Italian. *Ariosto* I find as diffuse, in parts, as *Spenser*—I understand completely the difference between them. I will cross the letter with some lines from *Lamia*.<sup>1</sup> Brown's kindest

<sup>1</sup>The holograph of this letter not being at present available for reference, it is not certain what was the state of the passage he "cross-scribed." An early manuscript in Lord Houghton's collection has been drawn on to supply the passage, with its variations from

## Keats's Letters

remembrances to you — and I am ever your most sincere friend,

JOHN KEATS.

Brown is gone to Chichester a-visiting — I shall be alone here for 3 weeks, expecting accounts of your health.

### LXXXVIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Fleet Street, Monday Morn [13 September 1819].

[*Postmark*, Lombard Street, 14 September 1819.]

MY DEAR GIRL: — I have been hurried to town by a Letter from my brother George; it is not of the brightest intelligence. Am I mad or not? I came by the Friday night coach and have not yet been to Hampstead. Upon my soul it is not my fault. I cannot resolve to mix any pleasure with my days: they go one like another, undistinguishable. If I were to see you to-day it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead, I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire. *Que feraije?* as the french novel writers say in fun, and I in earnest: really what can I do? Knowing well that my life must be passed in fatigue and trouble, I have been endeavouring to wean myself from you: for to myself alone what can be much of a misery? As far as they regard myself I can despise all events: but I cannot cease to love you. This morning I scarcely know what I am doing. I am going to Walthamstow. I shall return

the finished poem, as far as possible. See "Poetry and Prose by John Keats" (1890), pages 5-9.

## Keats's Letters

to Winchester to-morrow; <sup>1</sup> whence you shall hear from me in a few days. I am a Coward, I cannot bear the pain of being happy: 'tis out of the question: I must admit no thought of it.

Yours ever affectionately  
JOHN KEATS

### LXXXIX.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

Winchester, 22nd Sept. 1819.

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—I was very glad to hear from Woodhouse that you would meet in the country. I hope you will pass some pleasant time together. Which I wish to make pleasanter by a brace of letters, very highly to be estimated, as really I have had very bad luck with this sort of game this season. I “kepen in solitarinesse,” for Brown has gone a-visiting. I am surprised myself at the pleasure I live alone in. I can give you no news of the place here, or any other idea of it but what I have to this effect written to George. Yesterday I say to him was a grand day for Winchester. They elected a mayor. It was indeed high time the place should receive some sort of excitement. There was nothing going on: all asleep: not an old maid's sedan returning from a card-party: and if any old women got tipsy at Christenings they did not expose it in the streets. The first night tho' of our arrival here there was a slight uproar took place at about 10 o' the Clock. We heard distinctly a noise patting down the High Street as of a walking cane of the good old Dowager breed; and a little minute after we heard a less voice

<sup>1</sup> He must, I think, have waited till the day after: he would seem to have gone to Winchester again on the 15th of September.

## Keats's Letters

observe "What a noise the ferril made—it must be loose." Brown wanted to call the constables, but I observed it was only a little breeze, and would soon pass over.—The side streets here are excessively maiden-ladylike: the door-steps always fresh from the flannel. The knockers have a staid, serious, nay almost awful quietness about them. I never saw so quiet a collection of Lions' and Rams' heads. The doors are most part black, with a little brass handle just above the keyhole, so that in Winchester a man may very quietly shut himself out of his own house. How beautiful the season is now—How fine the air—a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never liked stubble-fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow, a stubble-field looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.<sup>1</sup>

I hope you are better employed than in gaping after weather. I have been at different times so happy as not to know what weather it was—No I will not copy a parcel of verses. I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom or particles, like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in English words. I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or, rather, artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion, and put a mark + to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one ¶ to the true voice of feeling. Upon

<sup>1</sup> He composed the ode "To Autumn" and had written it out in a letter to Woodhouse of the same day, which is not known to be extant.



## Keats's Letters

my soul 'twas imagination — I cannot make the distinction — Every now and then there is a Miltonic intonation — But I cannot make the division properly. The fact is, I must take a walk; for I am writing a long letter to George: and have been employed at it all the morning. You will ask, have I heard from George. I am sorry to say not the best news — I hope for better. This is the reason, among others, that if I write to you it must be in such a scrap-like way. I have no meridian to date interests from, or measure circumstances. To-night I am all in a mist; I scarcely know what's what. But you knowing my unsteady and vagarish disposition, will guess that all this turmoil will be settled by to-morrow morning. It strikes me to-night that I have led a very odd sort of life for the two or three last years — Here and there — no anchor — I am glad of it. — If you can get a peep at Babbicombe before you leave the country, do. — I think it the finest place I have seen, or is to be seen, in the South. There is a Cottage there I took warm water at, that made up for the tea. I have lately shirk'd some friends of ours, and I advise you to do the same, I mean the blue-devils — I am never at home to them. You need not fear them while you remain in Devonshire. — There will be some of the family waiting for you at the Coach office — but go by another Coach.

I shall beg leave to have a third opinion in the first discussion you have with Woodhouse — just half-way, between both. You know I will not give up my argument — In my walk to-day I stoop'd under a railing that lay across my path, and asked myself "Why I did not get over." "Because," answered I, "no one wanted to force you under." I would give a guinea to be a reasonable man — good sound sense — a says what he thinks and does what he says man — and did not take snuff. They say men near death, however mad they may have been, come

## Keats's Letters

to their senses — I hope I shall here in this letter — there is a decent space to be very sensible in — many a good proverb has been in less — nay, I have heard of the statutes at large being changed into the Statutes at Small and printed for a watch paper.

Your sisters, by this time, must have got the Devonshire “ees” — short ees — you know ’em — they are the prettiest ees in the language. O how I admire the middle-sized delicate Devonshire girls of about fifteen. There was one at an inn door holding a quartern of brandy — the very thought of her kept me warm a whole stage — and a 16 miler too — “You’ll pardon me for being jocular.”

Ever your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

XC.

TO CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE

Winchester, Wednesday Eve.

[22 September 1819.]

MY DEAR DILKE : — Whatever I take to for the time I cannot leave off in a hurry ; letter writing is the go now ; I have consumed a quire at least. You must give me credit, now, for a free Letter when it is in reality an interested one, on two points, the one requestive, the other verging to the pros and cons. As I expect they will lead me to seeing and conferring with you in a short time, I shall not enter at all upon a letter I have lately received from George, of not the most comfortable intelligence : but proceed to these two points, which if you can theme out into sexions and subsexions, for my edification, you will oblige me. The first I shall begin upon, the other will follow like a tail to a Comet. I have written to

## Keats's Letters

Brown on the subject, and can but go over the same Ground with you in a very short time, it not being more in length than the ordinary paces between the Wickets. It concerns a resolution I have taken to endeavour to acquire something by temporary writing in periodical works. You must agree with me how unwise it is to keep feeding upon hopes, which depending so much on the state of temper and imagination, appear gloomy or bright, near or afar off, just as it happens. Now an act has three parts—to act, to do, and to perform—I mean I should *do* something for my immediate welfare. Even if I am swept away like a spider from a drawing room, I am determined to spin—homespun any thing for sale. Yea, I will traffic. Anything but Mortgage my Brain to Blackwood. I am determined not to lie like a dead lump. If Reynolds had not taken to the law, would he not be earning something? Why cannot I? You may say I want tact—that is easily acquired. You may be up to the slang of a cock-pit in three battles. It is fortunate I have not before this been tempted to venture on the common. I should a year or two ago have spoken my mind on every subject with the utmost simplicity. I hope I have learned a little better and am confident I shall be able to cheat as well as any literary Jew of the Market and shine up an article on any thing without much knowledge of the subject, aye like an orange. I would willingly have recourse to other means. I cannot; I am fit for nothing but literature. Wait for the issue of this Tragedy? No—there cannot be greater uncertainties east, west, north, and south than concerning dramatic composition. How many months must I wait! Had I not better begin to look about me now? If better events supersede this necessity what harm will be done? I have no trust whatever on Poetry. I don't wonder at it—the mar[v]el is to me how people read so much of it. I think

## Keats's Letters

you will see the reasonableness of my plan. To forward it I purpose living in cheap Lodging in Town, that I may be in the reach of books and information, of which there is here a plentiful lack. If I can find any place tolerably comfortable I will settle myself and fag till I can afford to buy Pleasure — which if I never can afford I must go without. Talking of Pleasure, this moment I was writing with one hand, and with the other holding to my Mouth a Nectarine — good God how fine. It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy — all its delicious embonpoint melted down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry. I shall certainly breed. Now I come to my request. Should you like me for a neighbour again? Come, plump it out, I won't blush. I should also be in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Wylie, which I should be glad of, though that of course does not influence me. Therefore will you look about Marsham, or Rodney<sup>1</sup> Street for a couple of rooms for me. Rooms like the gallant's legs in Massinger's time, "as good as the times allow, Sir." I have written to-day to Reynolds, and to Woodhouse. Do you know him? He is a Friend of Taylor's at whom Brown has taken one of his funny odd dislikes. I'm sure he's wrong, because Woodhouse likes my Poetry — conclusive. I ask your opinion and yet I may say to you as to him, Brown, that if you have any thing to say against it I shall be as obstinate and heady as a Radical. By the *Examiner* coming in your handwriting you must be in Town. They have put me into spirits. Notwithstanding my aristocratic temper I cannot help being very much pleased with the present public proceedings. I hope sincerely I shall be able to put a Mite of help to the Liberal side of the Question before I die. If you should have left Town again (for your Holidays cannot be up yet) let me know when this is

<sup>1</sup> *Romney Street* was probably what Keats meant; but what he wrote was *rodney*, with a small *r*.



## Keats's Letters

forwarded to you. A most extraordinary mischance has befallen two letters I wrote Brown — one from London whither I was obliged to go on business for George; the other from this place since my return. I can't make it out. I am excessively sorry for it. I shall hear from Brown and from you almost together, for I have sent him a Letter to-day: you must positively agree with me or by the delicate toe nails of the virgin I will not open your Letters. If they are as David says "suspicious looking letters" I won't open them. If St. John had been half as cunning he might have seen the revelations comfortably in his own room, without giving angels the trouble of breaking open seals. Remember me to Mrs. D. — and the Westmonasterian and believe me

Ever your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS —

XCI.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

Winchester, 23 September 1819.

Now I am going to enter on the subject of self. It is quite time I should set myself doing something, and live no longer upon hopes. I have never yet exerted myself. I am getting into an idle-minded, vicious way of life, almost content to live upon others. In no period of my life have I acted with any self-will but in throwing up the apothecary profession. That I do not repent of. Look at Reynolds, if he was not in the law, he would be acquiring, by his abilities, something towards his support. My occupation is entirely literary: I will do so, too. I will write, on the liberal side of the question, for whoever will pay me. I have not known yet what it is to be diligent. I

## Keats's Letters

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purpose living in town in a cheap lodging, and endeavouring, for a beginning, to get the theatricals of some paper. When I can afford to compose deliberate poems, I will. I shall be in expectation of an answer to this. Look on my side of the question. I am convinced I am right. Suppose the tragedy should succeed, — there will be no harm done. And here I will take an opportunity of making a remark or two on our friendship, and on all your good offices to me. I have a natural timidity of mind in these matters; liking better to take the feeling between us for granted, than to speak of it. But, good God! what a short while you have known me! I feel it a sort of duty thus to recapitulate, however unpleasant it may be to you. You have been living for others more than any man I know. This is a vexation to me, because it has been depriving you, in the very prime of your life, of pleasures which it was your duty to procure. As I am speaking in general terms, this may appear nonsense; you, perhaps, will not understand it; but if you can go over, day by day, any month of the last year, you will know what I mean. On the whole however this is a subject that I cannot express myself upon — I speculate upon it frequently; and believe me the end of my speculations is always an anxiety for your happiness. This anxiety will not be one of the least incitements to the plan I purpose pursuing. I had got into a habit of mind of looking towards you as a help in all difficulties. This very habit would be the parent of idleness and difficulties. You will see it is a duty I owe myself to break the neck of it. I do nothing for my subsistence — make no exertion. At the end of another year you shall applaud me, not for verses, but for conduct. While I have some immediate cash, I had better settle myself quietly, and fag on as others do. I shall apply to Hazlitt, who knows the market as well as any one, for something to bring me in a few pounds as soon as possible. I shall not suffer my

## Keats's Letters

pride to hinder me. The whisper may go round; I shall not hear it. If I can get an article in the *Edinburgh*, I will. One must not be delicate. Nor let this disturb you longer than a moment. I look forward with a good hope that we shall one day be passing free, untrammelled, unanxious time together. That can never be if I continue a dead lump. I shall be expecting anxiously an answer from you. If it does not arrive in a few days this will have miscarried, and I shall come straight to [Bedhampton?] before I go to town, which you I am sure will agree had better be done while I still have some ready cash. By the middle of October I shall expect you in London. We will then set at the theatres. If you have anything to gainsay, I shall be even as the deaf adder which stoppeth her ears.

. . . . .

### XCII.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

Winchester, 23 September 1819.

Do not suffer me to disturb you unpleasantly: I do not mean that you should not suffer me to occupy your thoughts, but to occupy them pleasantly; for I assure you I am as far from being unhappy as possible. Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones. You know this well. Real ones will never have any other effect upon me than to stimulate me to get out of or avoid them. This is easily accounted for—Our imaginary woes are conjured up by our passions, and are fostered by passionate feeling: our real ones come of themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are displacers of passion. The

## Keats's Letters

imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross; the real spur him up into an agent. I wish, at one view, you would see my heart towards you. 'Tis only from a high tone of feeling that I can put that word upon paper — out of poetry. I ought to have waited for your answer to my last before I wrote this. I felt however compelled to make a rejoinder to yours. I had written to Dilke on the subject of my last, I scarcely know whether I shall send my letter now. I think he would approve of my plan; it is so evident. Nay, I am convinced, out and out, that by prosing for a while in periodical works I may maintain myself decently.

### XCIII.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Winchester, Sunday Morn  
[*Postmark*, 3 October 1819].

MY DEAR HAYDON: — Certainly I might: but a few Months pass away before we are aware. I have a great aversion to letter writing which grows more and more upon me; and a greater to summon up circumstances before me of an unpleasant nature. I was not willing to trouble you with them. Could I have dated from my Palace of Milan you would have heard from me. Not even now will I mention a word of my affairs — only that “I Rab am here” but shall not be here more than a Week more, as I purpose to settle in Town and work my way with the rest. I hope I shall never be so silly as to injure my health and industry for the future by speaking, writing or fretting about my non-estate. I have no quarrel, I assure you, of so weighty a nature with the world, on my own account as I have on yours. I have done nothing — except for the amusement of a few people



## Keats's Letters

who refine upon their feelings till any thing in the understandable way will go down with them — people predisposed for sentiment. I have no cause to complain because I am certain any thing really fine will in these days be felt. I have no doubt that if I had written "Othello" I should have been cheered by as good a mob as Hunt. So would you be now if the operation of painting was as universal as that of Writing. It is not: and therefore it did behove men I could mention among whom I must place Sir George Beaumont to have lifted you up above sordid cares. That this has not been done is a disgrace to the country. I know very little of Painting, yet your pictures follow me into the Country. When I am tired of reading I often think them over and as often condemn the spirit of modern Connoisseurs. Upon the whole, indeed, you have no complaint to make, being able to say what so few Men can, "I have succeeded." On sitting down to write a few lines to you these are the uppermost in my mind, and, however I may be beating about the arctic while your spirit has passed the line, you may lay-to a minute and consider I am earnest as far as I can see. Though at this present "I have great dispositions to write" I feel every day more and more content to read. Books are becoming more interesting and valuable to me. I may say I could not live without them. If in the course of a fortnight you can procure me a ticket to the British Museum I will make a better use of it than I did in the first instance. I shall go on with patience in the confidence that if I ever do any thing worth remembering the Reviewers will no more be able to stumble-block me than the Royal Academy could you. They have the same quarrel with you that the Scotch nobles had with Wallace. The fame they have lost through you is no joke to them. Had it not been for you Fuseli would have been not as he is major

## Keats's Letters

but maximus domo. What Reviewers can put a hindrance to must be—a nothing—or mediocre which is worse. I am sorry to say that since I saw you I have been guilty of—a practical joke upon Brown which has had all the success of an innocent Wildfire among people. Some day in the next week you shall hear it from me by word of Mouth. I have not seen the portentous Book which was skummer'd at you just as I left town. It may be light enough to serve you as a Cork Jacket and save you for awhile the trouble of swimming. I heard the Man went raking and rummaging about like any Richardson. That and the Memoirs of Menage are the first I shall be at. From Sr. G. B's, Lord Ms<sup>1</sup> and particularly Sr. John Leicesters good lord deliver us. I shall expect to see your Picture plumped out like a ripe Peach—you would not be very willing to give me a slice of it. I came to this place in the hopes of meeting with a Library but was disappointed. The High Street is as quiet as a Lamb. The knockers are dieted to three raps per diem. The walks about are interesting from the many old Buildings and archways. The view of the High Street through the Gate of the City in the beautiful September evening light has amused me frequently. The bad singing of the Cathedral I do not care to smoke—being by myself I am not very coy in my taste. At St. Cross there is an interesting picture of Albert Dürer's—who living in such warlike times perhaps was forced to paint in his Gauntlets—so we must make all allowances. I am my dear Haydon

Yours ever

JOHN KEATS

Brown has a few words to say to you and will cross this.

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Beaumont and Lord Mulgrave.

## Keats's Letters

### XCIV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

College Street.

[*Postmark*, 11 October 1819.]

MY SWEET GIRL: — I am living today in yesterday: I was in a complete fascination all day. I feel myself at your mercy. Write me ever so few lines and tell me you will never for ever be less kind to me than yesterday. — You dazzled me. There is nothing in the world so bright and delicate. When Brown came out with that seemingly true story against me last night, I felt it would be death to me if you ever had believed it — though against any one else I could muster up my obstinacy. Before I knew Brown could disprove it I was for the moment more miserable. When shall we pass a day alone? I have had a thousand kisses, for which with my whole soul I thank love — but if you should deny me the thousand and first — 'twould put me to the proof how great a misery I could live through. If you should ever carry your threat yesterday into execution — believe me 'tis not my pride, my vanity or any petty passion would torment me — really 'twould hurt my heart — I could not bear it. I have seen Mrs. Dilke this morning; she says she will come with me any fine day.

Ever yours

JOHN KEATS.

Ah hertè mine !

## Keats's Letters

### XCV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

25 College Street.

[*Postmark*, 13 October 1819.]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my Mind for ever so short a time. Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else. The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you against the unpromising morning of my Life. My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again — my Life seems to stop there — I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving — I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you. My sweet Fanny, will your heart never change? My love, will it? I have no limit now to my love. . . . Your note came in just here. I cannot be happier away from you. 'Tis richer than an Argosy of Pearles. Do not threat me even in jest. I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion — I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more — I could be martyr'd for my Religion — Love is my religion — I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet. You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my Love." I can do that no more — the



## Keats's Letters

pain would be too great. My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you.

Yours for ever

JOHN KEATS.

XCVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place

[*Postmark*, 16 October 1819].

MY DEAR FANNY:—My Conscience is always reproaching me for neglecting you for so long a time. I have been returned from Winchester this fortnight and as yet I have not seen you. I have no excuse to offer—I should have no excuse. I shall expect to see you the next time I call on Mr. A about George's affairs which perplex me a great deal—I should have to day gone to see if you were in town—but as I am in an industrious humour (which is so necessary to my livelihood for the future) I am loath to break through it though it be merely for one day, for when I am inclined I can do a great deal in a day—I am more fond of pleasure than study (many men have prefer'd the latter) but I have become resolved to know something which you will credit when I tell you I have left off animal food that my brains may never henceforth be in a greater mist than is theirs by nature—I took lodgings in Westminster for the purpose of being in the reach of Books, but am now returned to Hampstead being induced to it by the habit I have acquired in this room I am now in and also from the pleasure of being free from paying any petty attentions to a diminutive house-keeping. Mr. Brown has been my great friend for some time—without him I should have been in, perhaps, personal distress—as I know you love me though I do

## Keats's Letters

not deserve it, I am sure you will take pleasure in being a friend to Mr. Brown even before you know him. — My lodgings for two or three days were close in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Dilke who never sees me but she enquires after you — I have had letters from George lately which do not contain, as I think I told you in my last, the best news — I have hopes for the best — I trust in a good termination to his affairs which you please God will soon hear of — It is better you should not be teased with the particulars. The whole amount of the ill news is that his mercantile speculations have not had success in consequence of the general depression of trade in the whole province of Kentucky and indeed all America. — I have a couple of shells for you you will call pretty.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### XCVII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Great Smith Street, Tuesday Morn.

[*Postmark*, College Street, 19 October 1819.]

MY SWEET FANNY: — On awakening from my three days dream ("I cry to dream again") I find one and another astonish'd at my idleness and thoughtlessness. I was miserable last night — the morning is always restorative. I must be busy, or try to be so. I have several things to speak to you of tomorrow morning. Mrs. Dilke I should think will tell you that I purpose living at Hampstead. I must impose chains upon myself. I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for Love or death. I have no Patience with any thing else — if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest, be so now — and

## Keats's Letters

I will — my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell what I am writing.

Ever my love yours

JOHN KEATS.

XCVIII.

TO JOSEPH SEVERN

Wentworth Place

Wednesday [October 1819 ?]

DEAR SEVERN: — Either your joke about staying at home is a very old one or I really call'd. I don't remember doing so. I am glad to hear you have finish'd the Picture and am more anxious to see it than I have time to spare: for I have been so very lax, unemployed, unmeridian'd, and objectless these two months that I even grudge indulging (and that is no great indulgence considering the Lecture is not over till 9 and the lecture room seven miles from Wentworth Place) myself by going to Hazlitt's Lecture. If you have hours to the amount of a brace of dozens to throw away you may sleep nine of them here in your little Crib and chat the rest. When your Picture is up and in a good light I shall make a point of meeting you at the Academy if you will let me know when. If you should be at the Lecture to-morrow evening I shall see you — and congratulate you heartily — Haslam I know "is very Beadle to an amorous sigh."

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS.

## Keats's Letters

### XCIX.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wednesday Morn.

[*Postmark*, 17 November 1819.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I received your letter yesterday Evening and will obey it to-morrow. I would come to-day — but I have been to Town so frequently on George's Business it makes me wish to employ to-day at Hampstead. So I say Thursday without fail. I have no news at all entertaining — and if I had I should not have time to tell them as I wish to send this by the morning Post.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN.

### C.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Wentworth Place,

Wednesday [*Postmark*, Hampstead, 17 November 1819].

MY DEAR TAYLOR: — I have come to a determination not to publish any thing I have now ready written; but for all that to publish a Poem before long and that I hope to make a fine one. As the marvellous is the most enticing and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy and to let her manage for herself. I and myself cannot agree about this at all. Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst Men and women. I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto. The little dramatic skill I may as yet have how ever badly it might show in



## Keats's Letters

a Drama would I think be sufficient for a Poem. I wish to diffuse the colouring of St. Agnes eve throughout a poem in which Character and Sentiment would be the figures to such drapery. Two or three such Poems, if God should spare me, written in the course of the next six years, would be a famous gradus ad Parnassum altissimum. I mean they would nerve me up to the writing of a few fine Plays — my greatest ambition — when I do feel ambitious. I am sorry to say that is very seldom. The subject we have once or twice talked of appears a promising one, The Earl of Leicester's history. I am this morning reading Holingshed's Elizabeth. You had some Books awhile ago, you promised to lend me, illustrative of my subject. If you can lay hold of them or any others which may be serviceable to me I know you will encourage my low-spirited muse by sending them — or rather by letting me know when our Errand cart Man shall call with my little Box. I will endeavour to set my self selfishly at work on this Poem that is to be.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS —

### CI.

TO JOSEPH SEVERN

Wentworth Place

Monday Morn [6 December 1819?]

MY DEAR SEVERN : — I am very sorry that on Tuesday I have an appointment in the City of an undeferable nature; and Brown on the same day has some business at Guildhall. I have not been able to figure your manner of executing the Cave of despair, therefore it will be at any rate a novelty and surprise to me — I trust on the right

## Keats's Letters

side. I shall call upon you some morning shortly early enough to catch you before you can get out — when we will proceed to the Academy. I think you must be suited with a good painting light in your Bay window. I wish you to return the Compliment by going with me to see a Poem I have hung up for the Prize in the Lecture Room of the Surry Institution. I have many Rivals — the most threatening are An Ode to Lord Castlereagh, and a new series of Hymns for the New, new Jerusalem Chapel. You had best put me into your Cave of despair.

Ever yours sincerely

JOHN KEATS

## CII.

TO JAMES RICE

Wentworth Place.

[December 1819.]

MY DEAR RICE: — As I want the coat on my back mended, I would be obliged if you would send me the one Brown left at your house by the Bearer — During your late contest I had regular reports of you, how that your time was completely taken up and your health improving — I shall call in the course of a few days, and see whether your promotion has made any difference in your Behaviour to us. I suppose Reynolds has given you an account of Brown and Elliston. As he has not rejected our Tragedy, I shall not venture to call him directly a fool; But as he wishes to put it off till next season, I cannot help thinking him little better than a knave. — That it will not be acted this season is yet uncertain. Perhaps we may give it another furbish and try it at Covent Garden. 'Twould do one's heart good to see Macready in Ludolph. If you

## Keats's Letters

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do not see me soon it will be from the humour of writing, which I have had for three days continuing. I must say to the Muses what the maid says to the Man — "Take me while the fit is on me." — Would you like a true story? "There was a man and his wife who being to go a long Journey on foot, in the course of their travels came to a river which rolled knee-deep over the pebbles — In these cases the man generally pulls off his shoes and stockings, and carries the woman over on his back. This man did so. And his wife being pregnant and troubled, as in such cases is very common, with strange longings, took the strangest that ever was heard of. Seeing her husband's foot, a handsome one enough, looked very clean and tempting in the clear water, on their arrival at the other bank, she earnestly demanded a bit of it. He being an affectionate fellow, and fearing for the comeliness of his child, gave her a bit which he cut off with his clasp knife. — Not satisfied, she asked for another morsel. Supposing there might be twins, he gave her a slice more. Not yet contented she craved another piece. 'You wretch,' cries the man, 'would you wish me to kill myself? — Take that' — upon which he stabbed her with the knife, cut her open, and found three children in her Belly: two of them very comfortable with their mouths shut, the third with its eyes and mouth stark staring wide open. 'Who would have thought it,' cried the Widower, and pursued his Journey —." Brown has a little rumbling in his stomach this morning —

Ever yours sincerely,

JOHN KEATS. —

## Keats's Letters

### CIII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Monday Morn —

[*Postmark*, 20 December, 1819.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — When I saw you last, you ask'd me whether you should see me again before Christmas. You would have seen me if I had been quite well. I have not, though not unwell enough to have prevented me — not indeed at all — but fearful lest the weather should affect my throat which on exertion or cold continually threatens me. — By the advice of my Doctor I have had a warm great Coat made and have ordered some thick shoes — so furnish'd I shall be with you if it holds a little fine before Christmas day. — I have been very busy since I saw you, especially the last Week, and shall be for some time, in preparing some Poems to come out in the Spring, and also in brightening the interest of our Tragedy. — Of the Tragedy I can give you but news semigood. It is accepted at Drury Lane with a promise of coming out next season: as that will be too long a delay we have determined to get Elliston to bring it out this Season or to transfer it to Covent Garden. This Elliston will not like, as we have every motive to believe that Kean has perceived how suitable the principal Character will be for him. My hopes of success in the literary world are now better than ever. Mr. Abbey, on my calling on him lately, appeared anxious that I should apply myself to something else — He mentioned Tea Brokerage. I supposed he might perhaps mean to give me the Brokerage of his concern which might be executed with little trouble and a good profit; and therefore said I should have no objection to it, espe-



## Keats's Letters

cially as at the same time it occurred to me that I might make over the business to George — I questioned him about it a few days after. His mind takes odd turns. When I became a Suitor he became coy. He did not seem so much inclined to serve me. He described what I should have to do in the progress of business. It will not suit me. I have given it up. I have not heard again from George, which rather disappoints me, as I wish to hear before I make any fresh remittance of his property. I received a note from Mrs. Dilke a few days ago inviting me to dine with her on Xmas day which I shall do. Mr. Brown and I go on in our old dog trot of Breakfast, dinner (not tea, for we have left that off), supper, Sleep, Confab, stirring the fire and reading. Whilst I was in the Country last Summer, Mrs. Bentley tells me, a woman in mourning call'd on me, — and talked something of an aunt of ours — I am so careless a fellow I did not enquire, but will particularly : On Tuesday I am going to hear some School-boys Speechify on breaking up day — I'll lay you a pocket piece we shall have "My name is Norval." I have not yet look'd for the Letter you mention'd as it is mixed up in a box full of papers — you must tell me, if you can recollect, the subject of it. This moment Bentley brought a Letter from George for me to deliver to Mrs. Wylie — I shall see her and it before I see you. The 'Direction was in his best hand written with a good Pen and sealed with a Tassie's Shakspeare such as I gave you — We judge of people's hearts by their Countenances ; may we not judge of Letters in the same way ? — if so, the Letter does not contain unpleasant news — Good or bad spirits have an effect on the handwriting. This direction is at least unnervous and healthy. Our Sister is also well, or George would have made strange work with Ks and Ws. The little Baby is well or he would have formed precious vowels and Consonants — He sent off the Letter in a

## Keats's Letters

hurry, or the mail bag was rather a warm berth, or he has worn out his Seal, for the Shakespeare's head is flattened a little. This is close muggy weather as they say at the Ale houses —

I am, ever, my dear Sister,  
Yours affectionately

JOHN KEATS —

### CIV.

TO GEORGIANA AUGUSTA KEATS

Born Wylie

Thursday, January 13, 1820.

MY DEAR SIS.: — By the time that you receive this your troubles will be over. I wish you knew they were half over. I mean that George is safe in England and in good health. To write to you by him is almost like following one's own letter in the mail. That it may not be quite so, I will leave common intelligence out of the question, and write wide of him as I can. I fear I must be dull, having had no good-natured flip from Fortune's finger since I saw you, and no sideway comfort in the success of my friends. I could almost promise that if I had the means I would accompany George back to America, and pay you a visit of a few months. I should not think much of the time, or my absence from my books; or I have no right to think, for I am very idle. But then I ought to be diligent, and at least keep myself within the reach of materials for diligence. Diligence, that I do not mean to say; I should say dreaming over my books, or rather other people's books. George has promised to bring you to England when the five years have elapsed. I regret very much that I shall not be able to see you before that

## Keats's Letters

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time, and even then I must hope that your affairs will be in so prosperous a way to induce you to stop longer. Yours is a hardish fate, to be so divided from your friends and settled among a people you hate. You will find it improve. You have a heart that will take hold of your children; even George's absence will make things better. His return will banish what must be your greatest sorrow, and at the same time minor ones with it. Robinson Crusoe, when he saw himself in danger of perishing on the waters, looked back to his island as to the haven of his happiness, and on gaining it once more was more content with his solitude. We smoke George about his little girl. He runs the common beaten road of every father, as I dare say you do of every mother: there is no child like his child, so original, — original forsooth! However, I take you at your words. I have a lively faith that yours is the very gem of all children. Ain't I its uncle?

On Henry's marriage there was a piece of bride cake sent me. It missed its way. I suppose the carrier or coachman was a conjuror, and wanted it for his own private use. Last Sunday George and I dined at Millar's. There were your mother and Charles with Fool Lacon, Esq., who sent the sly, disinterested shawl to Miss Millar, with his own heathen name engraved in the middle. Charles had a silk handkerchief belonging to a Miss Grover, with whom he pretended to be smitten, and for her sake kept exhibiting and adoring the handkerchief all the evening. Fool Lacon, Esq., treated it with a little venturesome, trembling contumely, whereupon Charles set him quietly down on the floor, from where he as quietly got up. This process was repeated at supper time, when your mother said, "If I were you, Mr. Lacon, I would not let him do so." Fool Lacon, Esq., did not offer any remark. He will undoubtedly die in his bed. Your mother did not look quite so well on Sunday. Mrs. Henry

## Keats's Letters

Wylie is excessively quiet before people. I hope she is always so. Yesterday we dined at Taylor's, in Fleet Street. George left early after dinner to go to Deptford; he will make all square there for me. I could not go with him — I did not like the amusement. Haslam is a very good fellow indeed; he has been excessively anxious and kind to us. But is this fair? He has an innamorata at Deptford, and he has been wanting me for some time past to see her. This is a thing which it is impossible not to shirk. A man is like a magnet — he must have a repelling end. So how am I to see Haslam's lady and family, if I even went? for by the time I got to Greenwich I should have repell'd them to Blackheath, and by the time I got to Deptford they would be on Shooter's Hill; when I came to Shooter's Hill they would alight at Chatham, and so on till I drove them into the sea, which I think might be indictable. The evening before yesterday we had a pianoforte hop at Dilke's. There was very little amusement in the room, but a Scotchman to hate. Some people, you must have observed, have a most unpleasant effect upon you when you see them speaking in profile. This Scotchman is the most accomplished fellow in this way I ever met with. The effect was complete. It went down like a dose of bitters, and I hope will improve my digestion. At Taylor's too, there was a Scotchman, — not quite so bad, for he was as clean as he could get himself. Not having succeeded in Drury Lane with our tragedy, we have been making some alterations, and are about to try Covent Garden. Brown has just done patching up the copy — as it is altered. The reliance I had on it was in Kean's acting. I am not afraid it will be damn'd in the Garden. You said in one of your letters that there was nothing but Haydon & Co. in mine. There can be nothing of him in this, for I never see him or Co. George has introduced to us an American of the



## Keats's Letters

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name of Hart. I like him in a moderate way. He was at Mrs. Dilke's party — and sitting by me; we began talking about English and American ladies. The Miss — and some of their friends made not a very enticing row opposite us. I bade him mark them and form his judgement of them. I told him I hated Englishmen because they were the only men I knew. He does not understand this. Who would be Braggadochio to Johnny Bull? Johnny's house is his castle — and a precious dull castle it is; what a many Bull castles there are in so-and-so crescent! I never wish myself a general visitor and news-monger but when I write to you. I should like for a day or two to have somebody's knowledge — Mr. Lacon's for instance — of all the different folks of a wide acquaintance, to tell you about. Only let me have his knowledge of family minutiae and I would set them in a proper light; but, bless me, I never go anywhere. My pen is no more garrulous than my tongue. Any third person would think I was addressing myself to a lover of scandal. But we know we do not love scandal, but fun; and if scandal happens to be fun, that is no fault of ours. There were very good pickings for me in George's letters about the prairie settlement, if I had any taste to turn them to account in England. I knew a friend of Miss Andrews, yet I never mentioned her to him; for after I had read the letter I really did not recollect her story. Now I have been sitting here half an hour with my invention at work, to say something about your mother or Charles or Henry, but it is in vain. I know not what to say. Three nights since, George went with your mother to the play. I hope she will soon see mine acted. I do not remember ever to have thanked you for your tassels to my Shakspeare — there he hangs so ably supported opposite me. I thank you now. It is a continual memento of you. If you should have a boy, do not christen him John, and persuade

## Keats's Letters

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George not to let his partiality for me come across. 'Tis a bad name, and goes against a man. If my name had been Edmund I should have been more fortunate.

I was surprised to hear of the state of society at Louisville; it seems you are just as ridiculous there as we are here — threepenny parties, halfpenny dances. The best thing I have heard of is your shooting; for it seems you follow the gun. Give my compliments to Mrs. Audubon, and tell her I cannot think her either good-looking or honest. Tell Mr. Audubon he's a fool, and Briggs that 'tis well I was not Mr. A.

Saturday, January 15th.

It is strange that George having to stop so short a time in England, I should not have seen him for nearly two days. He has been to Haslam's and does not encourage me to follow his example. He had given promise to dine with the same party to-morrow, but has sent an excuse which I am glad of, as we shall have a pleasant party with us to-morrow. We expect Charles here to-day. This is a beautiful day. I hope you will not quarrel with it if I call it an American one. The sun comes upon the snow and makes a prettier candy than we have on twelfth-night cakes. George is busy this morning in making copies of my verses. He is making one now of an Ode to the Nightingale which is like reading an account of the Black Hole at Calcutta on an iceberg.

You will say this is a matter of course. I am glad it is — I mean that I should like your brothers more the more I know them. I should spend much more time with them if our lives were more run in parallel; but we can talk but on one subject — that is you.

The more I know of men the more I know how to value entire liberality in any of them. Thank God, there are a great many who will sacrifice their worldly interest

## Keats's Letters

for a friend. I wish there were more who would sacrifice their passions. The worst of men are those whose self-interests are their passion; the next, those whose passions are their self-interest. Upon the whole I dislike mankind. Whatever people on the other side of the question may advance, they cannot deny that they are always surprised at hearing of a good action, and never of a bad one. I am glad you have something to like in America — doves. "Gertrude of Wyoming" and Birkbeck's book<sup>1</sup> should be bound up together like a brace of decoy ducks — one is almost as poetical as the other. Precious miserable people at the prairie. I have been sitting in the sun while I wrote this till it's become quite oppressive — this is very odd for January. The Vulcan fire is the true natural heat for winter. The sun has nothing to do in winter but to give a little glooming light much like shade.

Our Irish servant has piqued me this morning by saying that her father in Ireland is very much like my Shakespeare, only he had more colour than the engraving. You will find on George's return that I have not been neglecting your affairs. The delay was unfortunate, not faulty. Perhaps by this time you have received my three last letters, not one of which had reached before George sailed. I would give two-pence to have been over the world as much as he has. I wish I had money enough to do nothing but travel about for years. Were you now in England I dare say you would be able (setting aside the pleasure you would have in seeing your mother) to suck out more amusement from society than I am able to do. To me it is all as dull here as Louisville could be. I am tired of the theatres. Almost all parties I may chance to fall into I know by heart. I know the different styles of

<sup>1</sup> "Notes on a Journey in America, from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois."

## Keats's Letters

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talk in different places, what subjects will be started, how it will proceed like an acted play, from the first to the last act. If I go to Hunt's, I run my head into many tunes heard before, old puns and old music; to Haydon's worn-out discourses of poetry and painting. The Miss R[eynolds]'s I am afraid to speak to, for fear of some sickly reiteration of phrase or sentiment. When they were at the dance the other night I tried manfully to sit near and talk to them, but to no purpose; and if I had it would have been to no purpose still. My question or observation must have been an old one, and the rejoinder very antique indeed. At Dilke's I fall foul of politics. 'Tis best to remain aloof from people and like their good parts without being eternally troubled with the dull process of their every-day lives. When once a person has smoked the vapidness of the routine of society he must either have self-interest or the love of some sort of distinction to keep him in good humour with it. All I can say is that, standing at Charing Cross and looking east, west, north, and south I see nothing but dulness. I hope while I am young to live retired in the country. When I grow in years and have a right to be idle, I shall enjoy cities more.

If the American ladies are worse than the English they must be very bad. You say you should like your Emily brought up here. You had better bring her up yourself. You know a good number of English ladies; what encomium could you give of half a dozen of them? The greater part seem to me downright American. I have known more than one Mrs. Audubon. Her affectation of fashion and politeness cannot transcend ours. Look at our Cheapside tradesmen's sons and daughters — only fit to be taken off by a plague. I hope now soon to come to the time when I shall never be forced to walk through the city and hate as I walk.



## Keats's Letters

Monday, Jan. 17 [1820].

George had a quick rejoinder to his letter of excuse to Haslam, so we had not his company yesterday, which I was sorry for as there was our old set. I know three witty people, all distinct in their excellence — Rice, Reynolds, and Richards. Rice is the wisest, Reynolds the playfullest, Richards the out-o'-the-wayest. The first makes you laugh and think, the second makes you laugh and not think, the third puzzles your head. I admire the first, I enjoy the second, I stare at the third. The first is claret, the second ginger-beer, the third *crème de Byrappymdrag*. The first is inspired by Minerva, the second by Mercury, the third by Harlequin Epigram, Esq. The first is neat in his dress, the second slovenly, the third uncomfortable. The first speaks *adagio*, the second *allegretto*, the third both together. The first is Swifitean, the second Tom Cribean, the third Shandean. And yet these three eans are not three eans but one ean.

Charles came on Saturday but went early; he seems to have schemes and plans and wants to get off. He is quite right; I am glad to see him employed at business. You remember I wrote you a story about a woman named Alice<sup>1</sup> being made young again, or some such stuff. In your next letter tell me whether I gave it as my own, or whether I gave it as a matter Brown was employed upon at the time. He read it over to George the other day, and George said he had heard it all before. So Brown suspects I have been giving you his story as my own. I should like to set him right in it by your evidence. George has not returned from town; when he does I shall tax his memory. We had a young, long, raw, lean Scotchman with us yesterday, called Thornton. Rice, for fun or for mistake, would persist in calling him Stevenson.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably the name of the old woman referred to in the passage about a story of Brown's.

## Keats's Letters

I know three people of no wit at all, each distinct in his excellence — A, B, and C. A is the foolishest, B the sulkiest, C is a negative. A makes you yawn, B makes you hate, as for C you never see him at all though he were six feet high. — I bear the first, I forbear the second, I am not certain that the third is. The first is gruel, the second ditch-water, the third is spilt — he ought to be wiped up. A is inspired by Jack-o'-the-clock, B has been drilled by a Russian serjeant, C, they say, is not his mother's true child, but she bought him of the man who cries, Young lambs to sell.

Twang-dillo-dee — This you must know, is the amen to nonsense. I know a good many places where Amen should be scratched out, rubbed over with po[u]nce made of Momus's little finger bones, and in its place Twang-dillo-dee written. This is the word I shall be tempted to write at the end of most modern poems. Every American book ought to have it. It would be a good distinction in society. My Lords Wellington and Castle-reagh, and Canning, and many more, would do well to wear Twang-dillo-dee on their backs instead of Ribbons at their button-holes: how many people would go sideways along walls and quickset hedges to keep their "Twang-dillo-dee" out of sight, or wear large pigtailed to hide it. However there would be so many that the Twang-dillo-dees would keep one another in countenance — which Brown cannot do for me — I have fallen away lately. Thieves and murderers would gain rank in the world, for would any one of them have the poorness of spirit to condescend to be a Twang-dillo-dee? "I have robbed many a dwelling-house; I have killed many a fowl, many a goose, and many a Man (would such a gentleman say) but, thank Heaven, I was never yet a Twang-dillo-dee." Some philosophers in the moon, who spy at our globe as we do at theirs, say that Twang-dillo-dee is

## Keats's Letters

written in large letters on our globe of earth; they say the beginning of the "T" is just on the spot where London stands, London being built within the flourish; "wan" reaches downwards and slants as far as Timbuctoo in Africa; the tail of the "g" goes slap across the Atlantic into the Rio della Plata; the remainder of the letters wrap around New Holland, and the last "e" terminates in land we have not yet discovered. However, I must be silent; these are dangerous times to libel a man in — much more a world.

Friday, 27th [28 January 1820]. I wish you would call me names: I deserve them so much. I have only written two sheets for you, to carry by George, and those I forgot to bring to town and have therefore to forward them to Liverpool. George went this morning at 6 o'clock by the Liverpool coach. His being on his journey to you prevents my regretting his short stay. I have no news of any sort to tell you. Henry is wife bound in Camden Town; there is no getting him out. I am sorry he has not a prettier wife: indeed 'tis a shame: she is not half a wife. I think I could find some of her relations in Buffon, or Capt<sup>n</sup> Cook's voyages or the *hierogleglyphics* in Moor's Almanack, or upon a Chinese clock door, the shepherdesses on her own mantlepice, or in a *cruel* sampler in which she may find herself worsted, or in a Dutch toy shop window, or one of the daughters in the ark, or in any picture shop window. As I intend to retire into the country where there will be no sort of news, I shall not be able to write you very long letters. Besides I am afraid the postage comes to too much; which till now I have not been aware of.

People in military bands are generally seriously occupied. None may or can laugh at their work but the Kettle Drum, Long Drum, Do. Triangle and Cymbals. Thinking you might want a rat catcher I put your mother's old quaker-

## Keats's Letters

colour'd cat into the top of your bonnet. She's wi' kitten, so you may expect to find a whole family. I hope the family will not grow too large for its lodging. I shall send you a close written sheet on the first of next month, but for fear of missing the Liverpool Post I must finish here. God bless you and your little girl.

Your affectionate Brother,

JOHN KEATS.

CV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place

4 February 1820?]

Dearest Fanny, I shall send this the moment you return. They say I must remain confined to this room for some time. The consciousness that you love me will make a pleasant prison of the house next to yours. You must come and see me frequently: this evening, without fail—when you must not mind about my speaking in a low tone for I am ordered to do so though I *can* speak out.

Yours ever

sweetest love.—

turn over

J. KEATS.

Perhaps your Mother is not at home and so you must wait till she comes. You must see me to-night and let me hear you promise to come to-morrow.

Brown told me you were all out. I have been looking for the stage the whole afternoon. Had I known this I could not have remain'd so silent all day.



## Keats's Letters

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### CVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Sunday Morning.

[*Postmark*, 7 February 1820.]

MY DEAR SISTER : — I should not have sent those Letters without some notice if Mr. Brown had not persuaded me against it on account of an illness with which I was attack'd on Thursday. After that I was resolved not to write till I should be on the mending hand; thank God, I am now so. From imprudently leaving off my great coat in the thaw I caught cold which flew to my Lungs. Every remedy that has been applied has taken the desired effect, and I have nothing now to do but stay within doors for some time. If I should be confined long I shall write to Mr. Abbey to ask permission for you to visit me. George has been running great chance of a similar attack, but I hope the sea air will be his Physician in case of illness — the air out at sea is always more temperate than on land — George mentioned, in his Letters to us, something of Mr. Abbey's regret concerning the silence kept up in his house. It is entirely the fault of his Manner. You must be careful always to wear warm cloathing not only in frost but in a Thaw. — I have no news to tell you. The half built houses opposite us stand just as they were and seem dying of old age before they are brought up. The grass looks very dingy, the Celery is all gone, and there is nothing to enliven one but a few Cabbage Stalks that seem fix'd on the superannuated List. Mrs. Dilke has been ill but is better. Several of my friends have been to see me. Mrs. Reynolds was here this morning and the two Mr. Wylie's. Brown has been very alert about me, though

## Keats's Letters

a little wheezy himself this weather. Every body is ill. Yesterday evening Mr. Davenport, a gentleman of Hampstead, sent me an invitation to supper, instead of his coming to see us, having so bad a cold he could not stir out — so you see 'tis the weather and I am among a thousand. Whenever you have an inflammatory fever never mind about eating. The day on which I was getting ill I felt this fever to a great height, and therefore almost entirely abstained from food the whole day. I have no doubt experienc'd a benefit from so doing — The Papers I see are full of anecdotes of the late King: how he nodded to a Coal-heaver and laugh'd with a Quaker and lik'd boiled Leg of Mutton. Old Peter Pindar is just dead: what will the old King and he say to each other? Perhaps the King may confess that Peter was in the right, and Peter maintain himself to have been wrong. You shall hear from me again on Tuesday.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN.

### CVII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place

February 1820?]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — If illness makes such an agreeable variety in the manner of your eyes I should wish you sometimes to be ill. I wish I had read your note before you went last night that I might have assured you how far I was from suspecting any coldness. You had a just right to be a little silent to one who speaks so plainly to you. You must believe — you shall, you will — that I can do nothing, say nothing, think nothing of you but what has its spring in the Love which has so long been my pleasure

## Keats's Letters

and torment. On the night I was taken ill — when so violent a rush of blood came to my Lungs that I felt nearly suffocated — I assure you I felt it possible I might not survive, and at that moment thought of nothing but you. When I said to Brown “this is unfortunate” I thought of you. ’Tis true that since the first two or three days other subjects have entered my head. I shall be looking forward to Health and the Spring and a regular routine of our old Walks.

Your affectionate

J. K.

### CVIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place  
February 1820?]

My sweet love, I shall wait patiently till to-morrow before I see you, and in the mean time, if there is any need of such a thing, assure you by your Beauty, that whenever I have at any time written on a certain unpleasant subject, it has been with your welfare impress’d upon my mind. How hurt I should have been had you ever acceded to what is, notwithstanding, very reasonable! How much the more do I love you from the general result! In my present state of Health I feel too much separated from you and could almost speak to you in the words of Lorenzo’s Ghost to Isabella

“Your Beauty grows upon me and I feel  
A greater love through all my essence steal.”

My greatest torment since I have known you has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid; but that

## Keats's Letters

suspicion I dismiss utterly and remain happy in the surety of your Love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight. Send me the words "Good night" to put under my pillow.

Dearest Fanny,  
Your affectionate

J. K.

### CIX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — According to all appearances I am to be separated from you as much as possible. How I shall be able to bear it, or whether it will not be worse than your presence now and then, I cannot tell. I must be patient, and in the mean time you must think of it as little as possible. Let me not longer detain you from going to Town — there may be no end to this imprisoning of you. Perhaps you had better not come before to-morrow evening: send me however without fail a good night.

You know our situation — what hope is there if I should be recovered ever so soon — my very health will not suffer me to make any great exertion. I am recommended not even to read poetry, much less write it. I wish I had even a little hope. I cannot say forget me — but I would mention that there are impossibilities in the world. No more of this. I am not strong enough to be weaned — take no notice of it in your good night.

Happen what may I shall ever be my dearest Love  
Your affectionate

J. K.



## Keats's Letters

CX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

My dearest Girl, how could it ever have been my wish to forget you? how could I have said such a thing? The utmost stretch my mind has been capable of was to endeavour to forget you for your own sake seeing what a chance there was of my remaining in a precarious state of health. I would have borne it as I would bear death if fate was in that humour; but I should as soon think of choosing to die as to part from you. Believe too my Love that our friends think and speak for the best, and if their best is not our best it is not their fault. When I am better I will speak with you at large on these subjects, if there is any occasion — I think there is none. I am rather nervous to-day perhaps from being a little recovered and suffering my mind to take little excursions beyond the doors and windows. I take it for a good sign, but as it must not be encouraged you had better delay seeing me till to-morrow. Do not take the trouble of writing much: merely send me my good night.

Remember me to your Mother and Margaret.

Your affectionate

J. K.

## Keats's Letters

### CXI.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY:—Then all we have to do is to be patient. Whatever violence I may sometimes do myself by hinting at what would appear to any one but ourselves a matter of necessity, I do not think I could bear any approach of a thought of losing you. I slept well last night, but cannot say that I improve very fast. I shall expect you to-morrow, for it is certainly better that I should see you seldom. Let me have your good night.

Your affectionate

J. K.

### CXII.

TO JAMES RICE

Wentworth Place,  
16 February 1820.

MY DEAR RICE:—I have not been well enough to make any tolerable rejoinder to your kind letter. I will, as you advise, be very chary of my health and spirits. I am sorry to hear of your relapse and hypochondriac symptoms attending it. Let us hope for the best, as you say. I shall follow your example in looking to the future good rather than brooding upon the present ill. I have not been so worn with lengthened illnesses as you have, therefore cannot answer you on your own ground with respect to those haunting and deformed thoughts and feelings you

## Keats's Letters

speak of. When I have been, or supposed myself in health, I have had my share of them, especially within the last year. I may say, that for six months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. Either that gloom overspread me, or I was suffering under some passionate feeling, or if I turned to versify, that acerbated the poison of either sensation. The beauties of nature had lost their power over me. How astonishingly (here I must premise that illness, as far as I can judge in so short a time, has relieved my mind of a load of deceptive thoughts and images, and makes me perceive things in a truer light), — how astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us! Like poor Falstaff, though I do not “babble,” I think of green fields; I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy — their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because they are connected with the most thoughtless and the happiest moments of our lives. I have seen foreign flowers in hothouses, of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them. The simple flowers of our Spring are what I want to see again.

Brown has left the inventive and taken to the imitative art. He is doing his forte, which is copying Hogarth's heads. He has just made a purchase of the Methodist Meeting picture, which gave me a horrid dream a few nights ago. I hope I shall sit under the trees with you again in some such place as the Isle of Wight. I do not mind a game of cards in a saw-pit or waggon, but if ever you catch me on a stage-coach in the winter full against the wind, bring me down with a brace of bullets, and I promise not to 'peach. Remember me to Reynolds, and say how much I should like to hear from him; that Brown returned immediately after he went on Sunday, and that

## Keats's Letters

I was vexed at forgetting to ask him to lunch; for as he went towards the gate, I saw he was fatigued and hungry.

I am, my dear Rice,

Ever most sincerely yours,

JOHN KEATS.

I have broken this open to let you know I was surprised at seeing it on the table this morning, thinking it had gone long ago.

### CXIII.

TO FANNY KEATS

[*Postmark*, 19 February 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY:— Being confined almost entirely to vegetable food and the weather being at the same time so much against me, I cannot say I have much improved since I wrote last. The Doctor tells me there are no dangerous Symptoms about me and quietness of mind and fine weather will restore me. Mind my advice to be very careful to wear warm cloathing in a thaw. I will write again on Tuesday when I hope to send you good news.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### CXIV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,

February 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY:— I read your note in bed last night, and that might be the reason of my sleeping so



## Keats's Letters

much better. I think Mr. Brown is right in supposing you may stop too long with me, so very nervous as I am. Send me every evening a written Good night. If you come for a few minutes about six it may be the best time. Should you ever fancy me too low-spirited I must warn you to ascribe it to the medicine I am at present taking which is of a nerve-shaking nature. I shall impute any depression I may experience to this cause. I have been writing with a vile old pen the whole week, which is excessively ungallant. The fault is in the Quill: I have mended it and still it is very much inclin'd to make blind es. However these last lines are in a much better style of penmanship, thof a little disfigured by the smear of black currant jelly; which has made a little mark on one of the Pages of Brown's Ben Jonson, the very best book he has. I have lick'd it but it remains very purple. I did not know whether to say purple or blue so in the mixture of the thought wrote purplue which may be an excellent name for a colour made up of those two, and would suit well to start next spring. Be very careful of open doors and windows and going without your duffle grey. God bless you Love!

J. KEATS.

P.S. I am sitting in the back room. Remember me to your Mother.

CXV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAR FANNY:—Do not let your mother suppose that you hurt me by writing at night. For some reason

## Keats's Letters

or other your last night's note was not so treasureable as former ones. I would fain that you call me *Love* still. To see you happy and in high spirits is a great consolation to me — still let me believe that you are not half so happy as my restoration would make you. I am nervous, I own, and may think myself worse than I really am; if so you must indulge me, and pamper with that sort of tenderness you have manifested towards me in different Letters. My sweet creature when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffer'd for you from the day I left you to go to the isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have pass'd some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the Beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently. When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you! Even if I was well — I must make myself as good a Philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake I have found other thoughts intrude upon me. "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory — but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." Thoughts like these came very feebly whilst I was in health and every pulse beat for you — now you divide with this (may I say it?) "last infirmity of noble minds" all my reflection.

God bless you, Love.

J. KEATS.

## Keats's Letters

### CXVI.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820 ?]

MY DEAREST GIRL:—You spoke of having been unwell in your last note: have you recover'd? That note has been a great delight to me. I am stronger than I was: the Doctors say there is very little the matter with me, but I cannot believe them till the weight and tightness of my Chest is mitigated. I will not indulge or pain myself by complaining of my long separation from you. God alone knows whether I am destined to taste of happiness with you: at all events I myself know thus much, that I consider it no mean Happiness to have lov'd you thus far — if it is to be no further I shall not be unthankful — if I am to recover, the day of my recovery shall see me by your side from which nothing shall separate me. If well you are the only medicine that can keep me so. Perhaps, aye surely, I am writing in too depress'd a state of mind — ask your Mother to come and see me — she will bring you a better account than mine.

Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

### CXVII.

TO JOHN HAMILTON REYNOLDS

[*Postmark*, 23 or 25 February 1820.]

MY DEAR REYNOLDS:—I have been improving since you saw me: my nights are better which I think is a very

## Keats's Letters

encouraging thing. You mention your cold in rather too slighting a manner — if you travel outside have some flannel against the wind — which I hope will not keep on at this rate when you are in the Packet boat. Should it rain do not stop upon deck though the Passengers should vomit themselves inside out. Keep under Hatches from all sort of wet.

I am pretty well provided with Books at present, when you return I may give you a commission or two. Mr. B. C.<sup>1</sup> has sent me not only his Sicilian Story but yesterday his Dramatic Scenes — this is very polite and I shall do what I can to make him sensible I think so. I confess they tease me — they are composed of amiability, the Seasons, the Leaves, the Moon &c. upon which he rings (according to Hunt's expression) triple bob majors. However that is nothing — I think he likes poetry for its own sake, not his. I hope I shall soon be well enough to proceed with my faeries<sup>2</sup> and set you about the notes on Sundays and Stray-days. If I had been well enough I should have liked to cross the water with you. Brown wishes you a pleasant voyage — Have fish for dinner at the sea ports, and don't forget a bottle of Claret. You will not meet with so much to hate at Brussels as at Paris. Remember me to all my friends. If I were well enough I would paraphrase an ode of Horace's for you, on your embarking in the seventy years ago style. The Packet will bear a comparison with a Roman galley at any rate.

Ever yours affectionately

J. KEATS.

<sup>1</sup> Bryan Waller Procter ("Barry Cornwall").

<sup>2</sup> "The Cap and Bells."



## Keats's Letters

### CXVIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
24 February 1820?]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — Indeed I will not deceive you with respect to my Health. This is the fact as far as I know. I have been confined three weeks and am not yet well — this proves that there is something wrong about me which my constitution will either conquer or give way to. Let us hope for the best. Do you hear the Thrush singing over the field? I think it is a sign of mild weather — so much the better for me. Like all Sinners now I am ill I philosophize, aye out of my attachment to every thing, Trees, flowers, Thrushes, Spring, Summer, Claret, &c. &c. — aye every thing but you. — My sister would be glad of my company a little longer. That Thrush is a fine fellow. I hope he was fortunate in his choice this year. Do not send any more of my Books home. I have a great pleasure in the thought of you looking on them.

Ever yours

my sweet Fanny

J. K.

### CXIX.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Thursday [24 February 1820].  
[*Postmark*, 25 February 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I am sorry to hear you have been so unwell: now you are better, keep so. Remember to be

## Keats's Letters

very careful of your cloathing — this climate requires the utmost care. There has been very little alteration in me lately. I am much the same as when I wrote last. When I am well enough to return to my old diet I shall get stronger. If my recovery should be delay'd long I will ask Mr. Abbey to let you visit me — keep up your Spirits as well as you can. You shall hear soon again from me —

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### CXX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
25 February 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY: — I had a better night last night than I have had since my attack, and this morning I am the same as when you saw me. I have been turning over two volumes of Letters written between Rousseau and two Ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the Ladies and gentlemen in those days were so clever, and which is still prevalent among Ladies of this Country who live in a state of reasoning romance. The likeness however only extends to the mannerism, not to the dexterity. What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! What would his Ladies have said! I don't care much — I would sooner have Shakespeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime Petticoats. One calls herself Clara and her friend Julia, two of Rousseau's heroines — they all the same time christen poor Jean Jacques St. Preux — who is the pure cavalier of his famous novel. Thank God I am

## Keats's Letters

born in England with our own great Men before my eyes. Thank God that you are fair and can love me without being Letter-written and sentimentaliz'd into it. — Mr. Barry Cornwall has sent me another Book, his first, with a polite note. I must do what I can to make him sensible of the esteem I have for his kindness. If this north east would take a turn it would be so much the better for me. Good bye, my love, my dear love, my beauty —  
love me for ever.

J. K.

### CXXI.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — I continue much the same as usual, I think a little better. My spirits are better also, and consequently I am more resign'd to my confinement. I dare not think of you much or write much to you. Remember me to all. Ever your affectionate

JOHN KEATS.

### CXXII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I think you had better not make any long stay with me when Mr. Brown is at home. Whenever he goes out you may bring your work. You will have a pleasant walk to-day. I shall see you pass. I shall follow you with my eyes over the Heath. Will

## Keats's Letters

you come towards evening instead of before dinner? When you are gone, 'tis past—if you do not come till the evening I have something to look forward to all day. Come round to my window for a moment when you have read this. Thank your Mother, for the preserves, for me. The raspberry will be too sweet not having any acid; therefore as you are so good a girl I shall make you a present of it. Good bye                      My sweet Love!

J. KEATS.

## CXXIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
February 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY : — The power of your benediction is of not so weak a nature as to pass from the ring in four and twenty hours — it is like a sacred Chalice once consecrated and ever consecrate. I shall kiss your name and mine where your Lips have been — Lips ! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things ? Thank God, though I hold them the dearest pleasures in the universe, I have a consolation independent of them in the certainty of your affection. I could write a song in the style of Tom Moore's Pathetic about Memory if that would be any relief to me. No 'twould not. I will be as obstinate as a Robin, I will not sing in a cage. Health is my expected heaven and you are the Houri — this word I believe is both singular and plural — if only plural, never mind — you are a thousand of them.

Ever yours affectionately  
my dearest,

J. K.

You had better not come to-day.



## Keats's Letters

### CXXIV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

MY DEAREST LOVE: — You must not stop so long in the cold — I have been suspecting that window to be open. — Your note half-cured me. When I want some more oranges I will tell you — these are just à propos. I am kept from food so feel rather weak — otherwise very well. Pray do not stop so long upstairs — it makes me uneasy — come every now and then and stop a half minute. Remember me to your Mother.

Your ever affectionate

J. KEATS.

### CXXV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

SWEETEST FANNY: — You fear, sometimes, I do not love you so much as you wish? My dear Girl I love you ever and ever and without reserve. The more I have known you the more have I lov'd. In every way — even my jealousies have been agonies of Love, in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I have vex'd you too much. But for Love! Can I help it? You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefulest. When you pass'd my window home yester-

## Keats's Letters

day, I was fill'd with as much admiration as if I had then seen you for the first time. You uttered a half complaint once that I only lov'd your Beauty. Have I nothing else then to love in you but that? Do not I see a heart naturally furnish'd with wings imprison itself with me? No ill prospect has been able to turn your thoughts a moment from me. This perhaps should be as much a subject of sorrow as joy—but I will not talk of that. Even if you did not love me I could not help an entire devotion to you: how much more deeply then must I feel for you knowing you love me. My Mind has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my Mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you. When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of window: you always concentrate my whole senses. The anxiety shown about our Loves in your last note is an immense pleasure to me: however you must not suffer such speculations to molest you any more: nor will I any more believe you can have the least pique against me. Brown is gone out—but here is Mrs. Wylie—when she is gone I shall be awake for you.—Remembrances to your Mother.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

### CXXVI.

TO CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE

[*Postmark*, Hampstead, 4 March 1820.]

MY DEAR DILKE:—Since I saw you I have been gradually, too gradually perhaps, improving; and though under an interdict with respect to animal food, living upon pseudo victuals, Brown says I have pick'd up a little flesh

## Keats's Letters

lately. If I can keep off inflammation for the next six weeks I trust I shall do very well. You certainly should have been at Martin's dinner for making an index is surely as dull work as engraving. Have you heard that the Bookseller is going to tie himself to the manger eat or not as he pleases. He says Rice shall have his foot on the fender notwithstanding. Reynolds is going to sail on the salt seas. Brown has been mightily progressing with his Hogarth.<sup>1</sup> A damn'd melancholy picture it is, and during the first week of my illness it gave me a psalm-singing nightmare, that made me almost faint away in my sleep. I know I am better, for I can bear the Picture. I have experienced a specimen of great politeness from Mr. Barry Cornwall. He has sent me his books. Some time ago he had given his first publish'd book to Hunt for me; Hunt forgot to give it and Barry Cornwall thinking I had received it must have thought me a very neglectful fellow. Notwithstanding he sent me his second book and on my explaining that I had not received his first he sent me that also. I am sorry to see by Mrs. D.'s note that she has been so unwell with the spasms. Does she continue the Medicines that benefited her so much? I am afraid not. Remember me to her and say I shall not expect her at Hampstead next week unless the Weather changes for the warmer. It is better to run no chance of a super-numer[ar]y cold in March. As for you you must come. You must improve in your penmanship; your writing is like the speaking of a child of three years old, very understandable to its father but to no one else. The worst is it looks well — no that is not the worst — the worst is, it is worse than Bailey's. Bailey's looks illegible and may perchance be read; yours looks very legible, and may perchance not be read. I would endeavour to give you a fac-simile of your word Thistlewood if I were not minded

<sup>1</sup> See page 226.

## Keats's Letters

on the instant that Lord Chesterfield has done some such thing to his son. Now I would not bathe in the same River with Lord C. though I had the upper hand of the stream. I am grieved that in writing and speaking it is necessary to make use of the same particles as he did. Cobbett is expected to come in. O that I had two double plumpers for him. The ministry are not so inimical to him but it would like to put him out of Coventry. Casting my eye on the other side I see a long word written in a most vile manner,<sup>1</sup> unbecoming a Critic. You must recollect I have served no apprenticeship to old plays. If the only copies of the Greek and Latin authors had been made by you, Bailey and Haydon they were as good as lost. It has been said that the Character of a Man may be known by his handwriting—if the Character of the age may be known by the average goodness of said, what a slovenly age we live in. Look at Queen Elizabeth's Latin exercises and blush. Look at Milton's hand. I can't say a word for Shakespeare's.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

### CXXVII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY:—I am much better this morning than I was a week ago: indeed I improve a little every day. I rely upon taking a walk with you upon the first of May: in the mean time undergoing a babylonish captivity

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless the word *supernumerary*, from which Keats had dropped the penultimate *ar*. The next sentence has reference, I presume, to Mr. Dilke's continuation of Dodsley's Collection of Old Plays.



## Keats's Letters

I shall not be jew enough to hang up my harp upon a willow, but rather endeavour to clear up my arrears in versifying, and with returning health begin upon something new: pursuant to which resolution it will be necessary to have my or rather Taylor's manuscript,<sup>1</sup> which you, if you please, will send by my Messenger either to-day or to-morrow. Is Mr. D. with you to-day: You appeared very much fatigued last night: you must look a little brighter this morning. I shall not suffer my little girl ever to be obscured like glass breath'd upon, but always bright as it is her *nature* to. Feeding upon sham victuals and sitting by the fire will completely annul me. I have no need of an enchanted wax figure to duplicate me, for I am melting in my proper person before the fire. If you meet with anything better (worse) than common in your Magazines let me see it.

Good bye my sweetest Girl.

J. K.

### CXXVIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

My dearest Fanny, whe[ne]ver you know me to be alone, come, no matter what day. Why will you go out this weather? I shall not fatigue myself with writing too much I promise you. Brown says I am getting stouter. I rest well and from last night do not remember any thing horrid in my dream, which is a capital symptom, for any organic derangement always occasions a Phantasmagoria. It will be a nice idle amusement to hunt after a motto for

<sup>1</sup> Presumably the manuscript of "Lamia," "Isabella" etc., then about to be sent to press.

## Keats's Letters

my Book which I will have if lucky enough to hit upon a fit one — not intending to write a preface. I fear I am too late with my note — you are gone out — you will be as cold as a topsail in a north latitude — I advise you to furl yourself and come in a doors.

Good bye Love.

J. K.

### CXXIX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

My dearest Fanny, I slept well last night and am no worse this morning for it. Day by day if I am not deceived I get a more unrestrain'd use of my Chest. The nearer a racer gets to the Goal the more his anxiety becomes; so I lingering upon the borders of health feel my impatience increase. Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms — the difference is amazing Love. Death must come at last; Man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I fain would try what more pleasures than you have given, so sweet a creature as you can give. Let me have another opportunity of years before me and I will not die without being remember'd. Take care of yourself dear that we may both be well in the Summer. I do not at all fatigue myself with writing, having merely to put a line or two here and there, a Task which would worry a stout state of the body and mind, but which just suits me as I can do no more.

Your affectionate

J. K.

## Keats's Letters

CXXX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY:— Though I shall see you in so short a time I cannot forbear sending you a few lines. You say I did not give you yesterday a minute account of my health. To-day I have left off the Medicine which I took to keep the pulse down and I find I can do very well without it, which is a very favourable sign, as it shows that there is no inflammation remaining. You think I may be wearied at night you say: it is my best time; I am at my best about eight o'Clock. I received a Note from Mr. Procter to-day. He says he cannot pay me a visit this weather as he is fearful of an inflammation in the Chest. What a horrid climate this is? or what careless inhabitants it has? You are one of them. My dear girl do not make a joke of it: do not expose yourself to the cold. There's the Thrush again — I can't afford it — he'll run me up a pretty Bill for Music — besides he ought to know I deal at Clementi's. How can you bear so long an imprisonment at Hampstead? I shall always remember it with all the gusto that a monopolizing carle should. I could build an Altar to you for it.

Your affectionate

J. K.

## Keats's Letters

### CXXXI.

TO FANNY KEATS

[*Postmark*, 20 March 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY:—According to your desire I write to-day. It must be but a few lines for I have been attack'd several times with a palpitation at the heart and the Doctor says I must not make the slightest exertion. I am much the same to-day as I have been for a week past. They say 'tis nothing but debility and will entirely cease on my recovery of my strength which is the object of my present diet. As the Doctor will not suffer me to write I shall ask Mr. Brown to let you hear news of me for the future if I should not get stronger soon. I hope I shall be well enough to come and see your flowers in bloom —

Ever your most  
affectionate Brother  
JOHN —

### CXXXII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820.]

MY DEAREST GIRL:—As, from the last part of my note you must see how gratified I have been by your remaining at home, you might perhaps conceive that I was equally bias'd the other way by your going to Town, I cannot be easy to-night without telling you you would be



## Keats's Letters

wrong to suppose so. Though I am pleased with the one, I am not displeased with the other. How do I dare to write in this manner about my pleasures and displeasures? I will tho' whilst I am an invalid, in spite of you. Good night, Love!

J. K.

### CXXXIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820.]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — In consequence of our company I suppose I shall not see you before to-morrow. I am much better to-day — indeed all I have to complain of is want of strength and a little tightness in the Chest. I envied Sam's walk with you to-day; which I will not do again as I may get very tired of envying. I imagine you now sitting in your new black dress which I like so much and if I were a little less selfish and more enthusiastic I should run round and surprise you with a knock at the door. I fear I am too prudent for a dying kind of Lover. Yet, there is a great difference between going off in warm blood like Romeo, and making one's exit like a frog in a frost. I had nothing particular to say to-day, but not intending that there shall be any interruption to our correspondence (which at some future time I propose offering to Murray) I write something. God bless you my sweet Love! Illness is a long lane, but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible.

J. K.

## Keats's Letters

### CXXXIV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Wentworth Place,  
March 1820?]

DEAR GIRL : — Yesterday you must have thought me worse than I really was. I assure you there was nothing but regret at being obliged to forego an embrace which has so many times been the highest gust of my Life. I would not care for health without it. Sam would not come in — I wanted merely to ask him how you were this morning. When one is not quite well we turn for relief to those we love : this is no weakness of spirit in me : you know when in health I thought of nothing but you ; when I shall again be so it will be the same. Brown has been mentioning to me that some hint from Sam, last night, occasions him some uneasiness. He whispered something to you concerning Brown and old Mr. Dilke which had the complexion of being something derogatory to the former. It was connected with an anxiety about Mr. D. Sr's death and an anxiety to set out for Chichester. These sort of hints point out their own solution : one cannot pretend to a delicate ignorance on the subject : you understand the whole matter. If any one, my sweet Love, has misrepresented, to you, to your Mother or Sam, any circumstances which are at all likely, at a tenth remove, to create suspicions among people who from their own interested notions slander others, pray tell me : for I feel the least attain on the disinterested character of Brown very deeply. Perhaps Reynolds or some other of my friends may come towards evening, therefore you may choose whether you will come to see me early to-day before or after dinner as you may

## Keats's Letters

think fit. Remember me to your Mother and tell her to drag you to me if you show the least reluctance —

[Signature missing.]

### CXXXV.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place,

April 1st. [1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY : — I am getting better every day and should think myself quite well were I not reminded every now and then by faintness and a tightness in the Chest. Send your Spaniel over to Hampstead for I think I know where to find a Master or Mistress for him. You may depend upon it if you were even to turn it loose in the common road it would soon find an owner. If I keep improving as I have done I shall be able to come over to you in the course of a few weeks. I should take the advantage of your being in Town but I cannot bear the City though I have already ventured as far as the west end for the purpose of seeing Mr. Haydon's Picture<sup>1</sup> which is just finished and has m[ade it]'s appearance. I have not heard from George yet since he left Liverpool. Mr. Brown wrote to him as from me the other day — Mr. B. wrote two Letters to Mr. Abbey concerning me — Mr. A. took no notice and of course Mr. B. must give up such a correspondence when as the man said all the Letters are on one side. I write with greater ease than I had thought, therefore you shall soon hear from me again.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

<sup>1</sup> Christ's Entry into Jerusalem.

## Keats's Letters

### CXXXVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place,  
12 April [1820].

MY DEAR FANNY: — Excuse these shabby scraps of paper I send you — and also from endeavouring to give you any consolation just at present, for though my health is tolerably well I am too nervous to enter into any discussion in which my heart is concerned. Wait patiently and take care of your health, being especially careful to keep yourself from low spirits which are great enemies to health. You are young and have only need of a little patience. I am not yet able to bear the fatigue of coming to Walthamstow though I have been to Town once or twice. I have thought of taking a change of air. You shall hear from me immediately on my moving any where. I will ask Mrs. Dilke to pay you a visit if the weather holds fine, the first time I see her. The Dog is being attended to like a Prince. Your affectionate Brother

JOHN

### CXXXVII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Thursday —  
[*Postmark*, 4 May 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I went for the first time into the City the day before yesterday, for before I was very disinclined to encounter the scuffle, more from nervousness than real illness; which notwithstanding I should not have



## Keats's Letters

suffered to conquer me if I had not made up my mind not to go to Scotland, but to remove to Kentish Town till Mr. Brown returns. Kentish Town is a mile nearer to you than Hampstead — I have been getting gradually better but am not so well as to trust myself to the casualties of rain and sleeping out which I am liable to in visiting you. Mr. Brown goes on Saturday, and by that time I shall have settled in my new lodging, when I will certainly venture to you. You will forgive me I hope when I confess that I endeavour to think of you as little as possible and to let George dwell upon my mind but slightly. The reason being that I am afraid to ruminate on any thing which has the shade of difficulty or melancholy in it, as that sort of cogitation is so pernicious to health, and it is only by health that I can be enabled to alleviate your situation in future. For some time you must do what you can of yourself for relief; and bear your mind up with the consciousness that your situation cannot last for ever, and that for the present you may console yourself against the reproaches of Mrs. Abbey. Whatever obligations you may have had to her you have none now, as she has reproached you. I do not know what property you have, but I will enquire into it: be sure however that beyond the obligation that a lodger may have to a landlord you have none to Mrs. Abbey. Let the surety of this make you laugh at Mrs. A's foolish tattle. Mrs. Dilke's Brother has got your Dog. She is now very well — still liable to Illness. I will get her to come and see you if I can make up my mind on the propriety of introducing a stranger into Abbey's house. Be careful to let no fretting injure your health as I have suffered it — health is the greatest of blessings — with *health* and *hope* we should be content to live, and so you will find as you grow older — I am  
my dear Fanny your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

Keats's Letters

CXXXVIII.

TO CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE

[Wentworth Place,  
May 1820.]

MY DEAR DILKE: — As Brown is not to be a fixture at Hampstead, I have at last made up my mind to send home all lent books. I should have seen you before this, but my mind has been at work all over the world to find out what to do. I have my choice of three things, or at least two, — South America, or Surgeon to an Indiaman; which last, I think, will be my fate. I shall resolve in a few days. Remember me to Mrs. D. and Charles, and your father and mother.

Ever truly yours

JOHN KEATS

CXXXIX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Kentish Town,  
May 1820.]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — I endeavour to make myself as patient as possible. Hunt amuses me very kindly — besides I have your ring on my finger and your flowers on the table. I shall not expect to see you yet because it would be so much pain to part with you again. When the Books you want come you shall have them. I am very well this afternoon. My dearest . . .

[Signature cut off.]

## Keats's Letters

### CXL.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Tuesday Afternoon.

[Kentish Town, May 1820.]

MY DEAREST FANNY:—For this Week past I have been employed in marking the most beautiful passages in Spenser, intending it for you, and comforting myself in being somehow occupied to give you however small a pleasure. It has lightened my time very much. I am much better. God bless you.

Your affectionate

J. KEATS.

### CXLI.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Tuesday Morn.

[Kentish Town, May 1820.]

MY DEAREST GIRL:—I wrote a letter<sup>1</sup> for you yesterday expecting to have seen your mother. I shall be selfish enough to send it though I know it may give you a little pain, because I wish you to see how unhappy I am for love of you, and endeavour as much as I can to entice you to give up your whole heart to me whose whole existence hangs upon you. You could not step or move an eyelid but it would shoot to my heart—I am greedy of you. Do not think of anything but me. Do not live as if I was not existing. Do not forget me—But have I any right to say you forget me? Perhaps you think of me all day.

<sup>1</sup> Probably not extant.

## Keats's Letters

Have I any right to wish you to be unhappy for me? You would forgive me for wishing it if you knew the extreme passion I have that you should love me — and for you to love me as I do you, you must think of no one but me, much less write that sentence. Yesterday and this morning I have been haunted with a sweet vision — I have seen you the whole time in your shepherdess dress. How my senses have ached at it! How my heart has been devoted to it! How my eyes have been full of tears at it! Indeed I think a real love is enough to occupy the widest heart. Your going to town alone when I heard of it was a shock to me — yet I expected it — *promise me you will not for some time till I get better.* Promise me this and fill the paper full of the most endearing names. If you cannot do so with good will, do my love tell me — say what you think — confess if your heart is too much fasten'd on the world. Perhaps then I may see you at a greater distance, I may not be able to appropriate you so closely to myself. Were you to lose a favorite bird from the cage, how would your eyes ache after it as long as it was in sight; when out of sight you would recover a little. Perhaps if you would, if so it is, confess to me how many things are necessary to you besides me, I might be happier; by being less tantaliz'd. Well may you exclaim, how selfish, how cruel not to let me enjoy my youth! to wish me to be unhappy. You must be so if you love me. Upon my soul I can be contented with nothing else. If you would really what is call'd enjoy yourself at a Party — if you can smile in people's faces, and wish them to admire you *now* — you never have nor ever will love me. I see *life* is nothing but the certainty of your Love — convince me of it my sweetest. If I am not somehow convinced I shall die of agony. If we love we must not live as other men and women do — I cannot brook the wolfsbane of fashion and foppery and tattle — you must be mine to die upon the rack if I want



## Keats's Letters

you. I do not pretend to say that I have more feeling than my fellows, but I wish you seriously to look over my letters kind and unkind and consider whether the Person who wrote them can be able to endure much longer the agonies and uncertainties which you are so peculiarly made to create. My recovery of bodily health will be of no benefit to me if you are not mine when I am well. For God's sake save me—or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you. Again God bless you.

J. K.

No—my sweet Fanny—I am wrong—I do not wish you to be unhappy—and yet I do, I must while there is so sweet a Beauty—my loveliest, my darling! good bye! I kiss you—O the torments!

### CXLII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

11 June [1820].

MY DEAR TAYLOR:—In reading over the proof of “St. Agnes’ Eve” since I left Fleet Street, I was struck with what appears to me an alteration in the seventh stanza very much for the worse. The passage I mean stands thus—

her maiden eyes incline  
Still on the floor, while many a sweeping train  
Pass by.

’Twas originally written—

her maiden eyes divine  
Fix’d on the floor, saw many a sweeping train  
Pass by.

## Keats's Letters

My meaning is quite destroyed in the alteration. I do not use *train* for *concourse of passers by*, but for *skirts* sweeping along the floor.

In the first stanza my copy reads, second line —

bitter *chill* it was,

to avoid the echo *cold* in the second line.

Ever yours sincerely

JOHN KEATS

### CXLIII.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

[Kentish Town,  
June 1820.]

MY DEAR BROWN: — I have only been to ——'s once since you left, when —— could not find your letters. Now this is bad of me. I should, in this instance, conquer the great aversion to breaking up my regular habits, which grows upon me more and more. True, I have an excuse in the weather, which drives one from shelter to shelter in any little excursion. I have not heard from George. My book is coming out with very low hopes, though not spirits, on my part. This shall be my last trial; not succeeding, I shall try what I can do in the apothecary line. When you hear from or see —— it is probable you will hear some complaints against me, which this notice is not intended to forestall. The fact is, I did behave badly; but it is to be attributed to my health, spirits, and the disadvantageous ground I stand on in society. I could go and accommodate matters if I were not too weary of the world. I know that they are more happy and comfortable

## Keats's Letters

than I am ; therefore why should I trouble myself about it ? I foresee I shall know very few people in the course of a year or two. Men get such different habits that they become as oil and vinegar to one another. Thus far I have a consciousness of having been pretty dull and heavy, both in subject and phrase ; I might add, enigmatical. I am in the wrong, and the world is in the right, I have no doubt. Fact is, I have had so many kindnesses done me by so many people, that I am cheveux-de-frised with benefits, which I must jump over or break down. I met — in town, a few days ago, who invited me to supper to meet Wordsworth, Southey, Lamb, Haydon, and some more ; I was too careful of my health to risk being out at night. Talking of that, I continue to improve slowly, but, I think, surely. There is a famous exhibition in Pall-Mall of the old English portraits by Vandyck and Holbein, Sir Peter Lely, and the great Sir Godfrey. Pleasant countenances predominate ; so I will mention two or three unpleasant ones. There is James the First, whose appearance would disgrace a “Society for the Suppression of Women” ; so very squalid and subdued to nothing he looks. Then, there is old Lord Burleigh, the high-priest of economy, the political save-all, who has the appearance of a Pharisee just rebuffed by a Gospel *bon-mot*. Then, there is George the Second, very like an unintellectual Voltaire, troubled with the gout and a bad temper. Then, there is young Devereux, the favourite, with every appearance of as slang a boxer as any in the Court ; his face is cast in the mould of blackguardism with jockey-plaster. I shall soon begin upon “Lucy Vaughan Lloyd.”<sup>1</sup> I do not begin composition yet, being willing, in case of a relapse, to have nothing to reproach myself with. I hope the weather will give you the slip ; let it show itself and steal out of your

<sup>1</sup> This is the pen-name under which he projected to publish “The Cap and Bells.”

## Keats's Letters

company. When I have sent off this, I shall write another to some place about fifty miles in advance of you.

Good morning to you.

Yours ever sincerely

JOHN KEATS

### CXLIV.

TO FANNY KEATS

Friday Morn [23 June 1820].

[*Postmark*, Kentish Town, 26 June 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I had intended to delay seeing you till a Book which I am now publishing was out, expecting that to be the end of this week when I would have brought it to Walthamstow: on receiving your Letter of course I set myself to come to town, but was not able, for just as I was setting out yesterday morning a slight spitting of blood came on which returned rather more copiously at night. I have slept well and they tell me there is nothing material to fear. I will send my Book soon with a Letter which I have had from George who is with his family quite well.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### CXLV.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

Wednesday Morn[in]g.

[*Kentish Town*, 5 July 1820 ?]

MY DEAREST GIRL: — I have been a walk this morning with a book in my hand, but as usual I have been occupied with nothing but you: I wish I could say in an



## Keats's Letters

agreeable manner. I am tormented day and night. They talk of my going to Italy. 'Tis certain I shall never recover if I am to be so long separate from you: yet with all this devotion to you I cannot persuade myself into any confidence of you. Past experience connected with the fact of my long separation from you gives me agonies which are scarcely to be talked of. When your mother comes I shall be very sudden and expert in asking her whether you have been to Mrs. Dilke's, for she might say no to make me easy. I am literally worn to death, which seems my only recourse. I cannot forget what has pass'd. What? nothing with a man of the world, but to me deathful. I will get rid of this as much as possible. When you were in the habit of flirting with Brown you would have left off, could your own heart have felt one half of one pang mine did. Brown is a good sort of Man—he did not know he was doing me to death by inches. I feel the effect of every one of those hours in my side now; and for that cause, though he has done me many services, though I know his love and friendship for me, though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his assistance, I will never see or speak to him until we are both old men, if we are to be. I *will* resent my heart having been made a football. You will call this madness. I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years—you have amusements—your mind is away—you have not brooded over one idea as I have, and how should you? You are to me an object intensely desirable—the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you—no—you can wait—you have a thousand activities—you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you pass'd this month? Who have you smil'd with? All this may seem savage in me. You do not feel as I do—you do not know what it is to love

## Keats's Letters

—one day you may — your time has not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in Loneliness. For myself I have been a Martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forc'd from me by the torture. I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. You may have altered — if you have not — if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you — I do not want to live — if you have done so I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you, and not only you but *chaste you*; *virtuous you*. The Sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclination to a certain extent — you have no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day. — Be serious! Love is not a plaything — and again do not write unless you can do it with a crystal conscience. I would sooner die for want of you than —

Yours for ever

J. KEATS.

### CXLVI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Mortimer Terrace, Wednesday  
[*Postmark*, 6 July 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I have had no return of the spitting of blood, and for two or three days have been getting a little stronger. I have no hopes of an entire reestablishment of my health under some months of patience. My Physician tells me I must contrive to pass the Winter in Italy. This is all very unfortunate for us — we have no recourse but patience, which I am now practicing better

## Keats's Letters

than ever I thought it possible for me. I have this moment received a Letter from Mr. Brown, dated Dunvegan Castle, Island of Skye. He is very well in health and spirits. My new publication has been out for some days and I have directed a Copy to be bound for you, which you will receive shortly. No one can regret Mr. Hodgkinson's ill fortune: I must own illness has not made such a Saint of me as to prevent my rejoicing at his reverse. Keep yourself in as good hopes as possible; in case my illness should continue an unreasonable time many of my friends would I trust for my sake do all in their power to console and amuse you, at the least word from me — You may depend upon it that in case my strength returns I will do all in my power to extricate you from the Abbeyes. Be above all things careful of your health which is the corner stone of all pleasure.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### CXLVII.

TO FANNY KEATS

[*Postmark, 22 July 1820.*]

MY DEAR FANNY: — I have been gaining strength for some days: it would be well if I could at the same time say I [am] gaining hopes of a speedy recovery. My constitution has suffered very much for two or three years past, so as to be scarcely able to make head against illness, which the natural activity and impatience of my Mind renders more dangerous. It will at all events be a very tedious affair, and you must expect to hear very little alteration of any sort in me for some time. You ought to have received a copy of my Book ten days ago — I shall send another message to the Booksellers. One of the Mr.

## Keats's Letters

Wylie's will be here to day or to morrow when I will ask him to send you George's Letter. Writing the smallest note is so annoying to me that I have waited till I shall see him. Mr. Hunt does every thing in his power to make the time pass as agreeably with me as possible. I read the greatest part of the day, and generally take two half hour walks a day up and down the terrace which is very much pester'd with cries, ballad singers, and street music. We have been so unfortunate for so long a time, every event has been of so depressing a nature that I must persuade myself to think some change will take place in the aspect of our affairs. I shall be upon the look out for a trump card.

Your affectionate

Brother, JOHN —

CXLVIII.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Kentish Town, July 1820?]

MY DEAREST FANNY: — My head is puzzled this morning, and I scarce know what I shall say though I am full of a hundred things. 'Tis certain I would rather be writing to you this morning, notwithstanding the alloy of grief in such an occupation, than enjoy any other pleasure, with health to boot, unconnected with you. Upon my soul I have loved you to the extreme. I wish you could know the Tenderness with which I continually brood over your different aspects of countenance, action and dress. I see you come down in the morning: I see you meet me at the Window — I see every thing over again eternally that I ever have seen. If I get on the pleasant clue I live in a sort of happy misery, if on the unpleasant 'tis miserable misery. You complain of my illtreating you in word,



## Keats's Letters

thought and deed — I am sorry, — at times I feel bitterly sorry that I ever made you unhappy — my excuse is that those words have been wrung from me by the sharpness of my feelings. At all events and in any case I have been wrong; could I believe that I did it without any cause, I should be the most sincere of Penitents. I could give way to my repentant feelings now, I could recant all my suspicions, I could mingle with you heart and Soul though absent, were it not for some parts of your Letters. Do you suppose it possible I could ever leave you? You know what I think of myself and what of you. You know that I should feel how much it was my loss and how little yours. My friends laugh at you! I know some of them — when I know them all I shall never think of them again as friends or even acquaintance. My friends have behaved well to me in every instance but one, and there they have become tattlers, and inquisitors into my conduct: spying upon a secret I would rather die than share it with any body's confidence. For this I cannot wish them well, I care not to see any of them again. If I am the Theme, I will not be the Friend of idle Gossips. Good gods what a shame it is our Loves should be so put into the microscope of a Coterie. Their laughs should not affect you (I may perhaps give you reasons some day for these laughs, for I suspect a few people to hate me well enough, *for reasons I know of*, who have pretended a great friendship for me) when in competition with one, who if he never should see you again would make you the Saint of his memory. These Laughers, who do not like you, who envy you for your Beauty, who would have God-bless'd me from you for ever: who were plying me with discouragements with respect to you eternally. People are revengeful — do not mind them — do nothing but love me — if I knew that for certain life and health will in such event be a heaven, and death itself will be less painful.

## Keats's Letters

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I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here — how short is the longest Life. I wish to believe in immortality — I wish to live with you for ever. Do not let my name ever pass between you and those laughers; if I have no other merit than the great Love for you, that were sufficient to keep me sacred and unmentioned in such society. If I have been cruel and unjust I swear my love has ever been greater than my cruelty which lasts but a minute whereas my Love come what will shall last for ever. If concession to me has hurt your Pride god knows I have had little pride in my heart when thinking of you. Your name never passes my Lips — do not let mine pass yours. Those People do not like me. After reading my Letter you even then wish to see me. I am strong enough to walk over — but I dare not. I shall feel so much pain in parting with you again. My dearest love, I am afraid to see you; I am strong, but not strong enough to see you. Will my arm be ever round you again, and if so shall I be obliged to leave you again? My sweet Love! I am happy whilst I believe your first Letter. Let me be but certain that you are mine heart and soul, and I could die more happily than I could otherwise live. If you think me cruel — if you think I have sleighted you — do muse it over again and see into my heart. My love to you is “true as truth’s simplicity and simpler than the infancy of truth” as I think I once said before. How could I sleight you? How threaten to leave you? not in the spirit of a Threat to you — no — but in the spirit of Wretchedness in myself. My fairest, my delicious, my angel Fanny! Do not believe me such a vulgar fellow. I will be as patient in illness and as believing in Love as I am able.

Yours for ever my dearest

JOHN KEATS.

## Keats's Letters

### CXLIX.

TO FANNY BRAWNE

[Kentish Town,  
August 1820?]

I do not write this till the last  
that no eye may catch it.

MY DEAREST GIRL:—I wish you could invent some means to make me at all happy without you. Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you; every thing else tastes like chaff in my Mouth. I feel it almost impossible to go to Italy—the fact is I cannot leave you, and shall never taste one minute's content until it pleases chance to let me live with you for good. But I will not go on at this rate. A person in health as you are can have no conception of the horrors that nerves and a temper like mine go through. What Island do your friends propose retiring to? I should be happy to go with you there alone, but in company I should object to it; the backbitings and jealousies of new colonists who have nothing else to amuse themselves, is unbearable. Mr. Dilke came to see me yesterday, and gave me a very great deal more pain than pleasure. I shall never be able any more to endure the society of any of those who used to meet at Elm Cottage and Wentworth Place. The last two years taste like brass upon my Palate. If I cannot live with you I will live alone. I do not think my health will improve much while I am separated from you. For all this I am averse to seeing you—I cannot bear flashes of light and return into my glooms again. I am not so unhappy now as I should be if I had seen you yesterday. To be

## Keats's Letters

happy with you seems such an impossibility! it requires a luckier Star than mine! it will never be. I enclose a passage from one of your letters which I want you to alter a little — I want (if you will have it so) the matter express'd less coldly to me. If my health would bear it, I could write a Poem which I have in my head, which would be a consolation for people in such a situation as mine. I would show some one in Love as I am, with a person living in such Liberty as you do. Shakespeare always sums up matters in the most sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such Misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia "Go to a Nunnery, go, go!" Indeed I should like to give up the matter at once — I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men, and women more. I see nothing but thorns for the future — wherever I may be next winter, in Italy or nowhere, Brown will be living near you with his indecencies. I see no prospect of any rest. Suppose me in Rome — well, I should there see you as in a magic glass going to and from town at all hours, — I wish you could infuse a little confidence of human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any — the world is too brutal for me — I am glad there is such a thing as the grave — I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. At any rate I will indulge myself by never seeing any more Dilke or Brown or any of their Friends. I wish I was either in your arms full of faith or that a Thunder bolt would strike me.

God bless you.

J. K.



## Keats's Letters

CL.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

Mrs. Brawne's Next door to Brown's  
Wentworth Place, Hampstead, [August] 1820

MY DEAR HAYDON: — I am much better this morning than I was when I wrote the note: that is my hopes and spirits are better which are generally at a very low ebb from such a protracted illness. I shall be here for a little time and at home all and every day. A journey to Italy is recommended me, which I have resolved upon and am beginning to prepare for. Hoping to see you shortly

I remain

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

CLI.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place.

[*Postmark*, 4 o'Clock, 14 August 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — 'Tis a long time since I received your last. An accident of an unpleasant nature occurred at Mr. Hunt's and prevented me from answering you, that is to say made me nervous. That you may not suppose it worse I will mention that some one of Mr. Hunt's household opened a Letter of mine — upon which I immediately left Mortimer Terrace, with the intention of taking to Mrs. Bentley's again; fortunately I am not in so lone a situation, but am staying a short time with Mrs. Brawne who lives in the House which was Mrs. Dilke's. I am

## Keats's Letters

excessively nervous: a person I am not quite used to entering the room half choaks me. 'Tis not yet Consumption I believe, but it would be were I to remain in this climate all the Winter: so I am thinking of either voyaging or travelling to Italy. Yesterday I received an invitation from Mr. Shelley, a Gentleman residing at Pisa, to spend the Winter with him: if I go I must be away in a Month or even less. I am glad you like the Poems, you must hope with me that time and health will produce you some more. This is the first morning I have been able to sit to the paper and have many Letters to write if I can manage them. God bless you my dear Sister.

Your affectionate Brother

JOHN —

### CLII.

TO PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Hampstead, August 1820.

MY DEAR SHELLEY: — I am very much gratified that you, in a foreign country, and with a mind almost overoccupied, should write to me in the strain of the letter beside me. If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy. There is no doubt that an English winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering, hateful manner. Therefore, I must either voyage or journey to Italy, as a soldier marches up to a battery. My nerves at present are the worst part of me, yet they feel soothed that, come what extreme may, I shall not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bedposts. I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor poem, which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as I have done

## Keats's Letters

about reputation. I received a copy of the "Cenci," as from yourself, from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of—the poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits now-a-days is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have "self-concentration"—selfishness, perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together. And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of "Endymion," whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards? I am picked up and sorted to a pip. My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk. I am in expectation of "Prometheus" every day. Could I have my own wish effected, you would have it still in manuscript, or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first blights, on Hampstead Heath. I am returning advice upon your hands. Most of the poems in the volume I send you<sup>1</sup> have been written about two years, and would never have been published but for hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now. I must express once more my deep sense of your kindness, adding my sincere thanks and respects for Mrs. Shelley. In the hope of soon seeing you,

I remain most sincerely yours,

JOHN KEATS.

<sup>1</sup> "Lamia," "Isabella," etc.

## Keats's Letters

### CLIII.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Wentworth Place

Saty. Morn. [*Postmark*, 14 August 1820.]

MY DEAR TAYLOR: — My Chest is in so nervous a State, that any thing extra such as speaking to an unaccustomed Person or writing a Note half suffocates me. This Journey to Italy wakes me at daylight every morning and haunts me horribly. I shall endeavour to go though it be with the sensation of marching up against a Battery. The first step towards it is to know the expense of a Journey and a year's residence: which if you will ascertain for me and let me know early you will greatly serve me. I have more to say, but must desist, for every line I write increases the tightness of the Chest, and I have many more to do. I am convinced that this sort of thing does not continue for nothing. If you can come with any of our friends do.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS.

### CLIV.

TO BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

[Wentworth Place,

15 August 1820.]

MY DEAR HAYDON: — I am sorry to be obliged to try your patience a few more days when you will have the Book sent from Town. I am glad to hear you are in



## Keats's Letters

progress with another Picture. Go on. I am afraid I shall pop off just when my mind is able to run alone.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS

CLV.

TO JOHN TAYLOR

Wentworth Place

[15 August 1820.]

MY DEAR TAYLOR:—I do not think I mentioned anything of a Passage to Leghorn by Sea. Will you join that to your enquiries, and, if you can, give a peep at the Berth if the Vessel is [in] our river.

Your sincere friend

JOHN KEATS.

P.S. Somehow a copy of Chapman's Homer, lent to me by Haydon, has disappeared from my Lodgings — it has quite flown I am afraid, and Haydon urges the return of it so that I must get one at Longman's and send it to Lisson Grove — or you must — or as I have given you a job on the River — ask Mistessey.<sup>1</sup> I had written a Note to this effect to Hessey some time since but crumpled it up in hopes that the Book might come to light. This morning Haydon has sent another messenger. The copy was in good condition with the head. Damn all thieves! Tell Woodhouse I have not lost his *Blackwood*.

*Testamentary Paper enclosed in the foregoing*

My Chest of Books divide among my friends.

In case of my death this scrap of paper may be serviceable in your possession.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hessey.

## Keats's Letters

All my Estate real and personal consists in the hopes of the sale of books publish'd or unpublish'd. Now I wish *Brown* and you to be the first paid Creditors — the rest is in nubibus — but in case it should shower pay my Taylor the few pounds I owe him.

### CLVI.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

[Wentworth Place  
August 1820.]

MY DEAR BROWN:— You may not have heard from —, or —, or in any way, that an attack of spitting of blood, and all its weakening consequences, has prevented me from writing for so long a time. I have matter now for a very long letter, but not news: so I must cut everything short. I shall make some confession, which you will be the only person, for many reasons, I shall trust with. A winter in England would, I have not a doubt, kill me; so I have resolved to go to Italy, either by sea or land. Not that I have any great hopes of that, for, I think, there is a core of disease in me not easy to pull out. I shall be obliged to set off in less than a month. Do not, my dear Brown, teaze yourself about me. You must fill up your time as well as you can, and as happily. You must think of my faults as lightly as you can. When I have health I will bring up the long arrears of letters I owe you. My book has had good success among the literary people, and I believe has a moderate sale. I have seen very few people we know. — has visited me more than any one. I would go to — and make some inquiries after you, if I could with any bearable sensation; but a person I am not quite used to causes an

## Keats's Letters

oppression on my chest. Last week I received a letter from Shelley, at Pisa, of a very kind nature, asking me to pass the winter with him. Hunt has behaved very kindly to me. You shall hear from me again shortly.

Your affectionate friend

JOHN KEATS

### CLVII.

TO FANNY KEATS

Wentworth Place, Wednesday Morning

[*Postmark*, 23 August 1820.]

MY DEAR FANNY: — It will give me great Pleasure to see you here, if you can contrive it; though I confess I should have written instead of calling upon you before I set out on my journey, from the wish of avoiding unpleasant partings. Meantime I will just notice some parts of your Letter. The seal-breaking business is overblown. I think no more of it. A few days ago I wrote to Mr. Brown, asking him to befriend me with his company to Rome. His answer is not yet come, and I do not know when it will, not being certain how far he may be from the Post Office to which my communication is addressed. Let us hope he will go with me. George certainly ought to have written to you: his troubles, anxieties and fatigues are not quite a sufficient excuse. In the course of time you will be sure to find that this neglect is not forgetfulness. I am sorry to hear you have been so ill and in such low spirits. Now you are better, keep so. Do not suffer your Mind to dwell on unpleasant reflexions — that sort of thing has been the destruction of my health. Nothing is so bad as want of health — it makes one envy scavengers and cinder-sifters. There are enough real distresses and evils in wait for every one to try the most vigorous

## Keats's Letters

health. Not that I would say yours are not real — but they are such as to tempt you to employ your imagination on them, rather than endeavour to dismiss them entirely. Do not diet your mind with grief, it destroys the constitution ; but let your chief care be of your health, and with that you will meet your share of Pleasure in the world — do not doubt it. If I return well from Italy I will turn over a new leaf for you. I have been improving lately, and have very good hopes of “turning a Neuk” and cheating the consumption. I am not well enough to write to George myself — Mr. Haslam will do it for me, to whom I shall write to day, desiring him to mention as gently as possible your complaint. I am my dear Fanny

Your affectionate Brother,

JOHN.

### CLVIII.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

[Wentworth Place  
August 1820.]

MY DEAR BROWN: — I ought to be off at the end of this week, as the cold winds begin to blow towards evening ; — but I will wait till I have your answer to this. I am to be introduced, before I set out, to a Dr. Clark, a physician settled at Rome, who promises to befriend me in every way there. The sale of my book is very slow, though it has been very highly rated. One of the causes, I understand from different quarters, of the unpopularity of this new book, is the offence the ladies take at me. On thinking that matter over, I am certain that I have said nothing in a spirit to displease any woman I would care to please ; but still there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats, — they



## Keats's Letters

never see themselves dominant. I will say no more, but, waiting in anxiety for your answer, doff my hat, and make a purse as long as I can.

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

CLIX.

TO —————

[September 1820.]

The passport arrived before we started. I don't think I shall be long ill. God bless you — farewell.

JOHN KEATS

CLX.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

Saturday, Sept. 28 [1820]

Maria Crowther, off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight.

MY DEAR BROWN:— The time has not yet come for a pleasant letter from me. I have delayed writing to you from time to time, because I felt how impossible it was to enliven you with one heartening hope of my recovery; this morning in bed the matter struck me in a different manner; I thought I would write "while I was in some liking," or I might become too ill to write at all; and then if the desire to have written should become strong it would be a great affliction to me. I have many more letters to write, and I bless my stars that I have begun, for time seems to press,— this may be my best opportunity. We are in a calm, and I am easy enough this morning. If my spirits seem too low you may in some degree impute it to

## Keats's Letters

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our having been at sea a fortnight without making any way. I was very disappointed at not meeting you at Bedhampton, and am very provoked at the thought of you being at Chichester to-day. I should have delighted in setting off for London for the sensation merely, — for what should I do there? I could not leave my lungs or stomach or other worse things behind me. I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much — there is one I must mention and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it. The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I dare say you will be able to guess on what subject I am harping — you know what was my greatest pain during the first part of my illness at your house. I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed. I often wish for you that you might flatter me with the best. I think without my mentioning it for my sake you would be a friend to Miss Brawne when I am dead. You think she has many faults — but, for my sake, think she has not one. If there is anything you can do for her by word or deed I know you will do it. I am in a state at present in which woman merely as woman can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss Brawne and my sister is amazing. The one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my brother and sister in America. The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond

## Keats's Letters

everything horrible — the sense of darkness coming over me — I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing. Some of the phrases she was in the habit of using during my last nursing at Wentworth Place ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering. The receiving this letter is to be one of yours. I will say nothing about our friendship, or rather yours to me, more than that, as you deserve to escape, you will never be so unhappy as I am. I should think of — you in my last moments. I shall endeavour to write to Miss Brawne if possible to-day. A sudden stop to my life in the middle of one of these letters would be no bad thing, for it keeps one in a sort of fever awhile. Though fatigued with a letter longer than any I have written for a long while, it would be better to go on for ever than awake to a sense of contrary winds. We expect to put into Portland Roads to-night. The captain, the crew, and the passengers, are all ill-tempered and weary. I shall write to Dilke. I feel as if I was closing my last letter to you.

My dear Brown,

Your affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

CLXI.

TO MRS. BRAWNE

Oct. 24 [1820], Naples Harbour.

MY DEAR MRS. BRAWNE : — A few words will tell you what sort of a Passage we had, and what situation we are in, and few they must be on account of the Quarantine, our Letters being liable to be opened for the purpose of fumigation at the Health Office. We have to remain in the vessel ten days and are at present shut in a tier of ships.

## Keats's Letters

The sea air has been beneficial to me about to as great an extent as squally weather and bad accommodations and provisions has done harm. So I am about as I was. Give my Love to Fanny and tell her, if I were well there is enough in this Port of Naples to fill a quire of Paper—but it looks like a dream—every man who can row his boat and walk and talk seems a different being from myself. I do not feel in the world. It has been unfortunate for me that one of the Passengers is a young Lady in a Consumption—her imprudence has vexed me very much—the knowledge of her complaints—the flushings in her face, all her bad symptoms have preyed upon me—they would have done so had I been in good health. Severn now is a very good fellow but his nerves are too strong to be hurt by other people's illnesses—I remember poor Rice wore me in the same way in the Isle of Wight—I shall feel a load off me when the Lady vanishes out of my sight. It is impossible to describe exactly in what state of health I am—at this moment I am suffering from indigestion very much, which makes such stuff of this Letter. I would always wish you to think me a little worse than I really am; not being of a sanguine disposition I am likely to succeed. If I do not recover your regret will be softened—if I do your pleasure will be doubled. I dare not fix my Mind upon Fanny, I have not dared to think of her. The only comfort I have had that way has been in thinking for hours together of having the knife she gave me put in a silver-case—the hair in a Locket—and the Pocket Book in a gold net. Show her this. I dare say no more. Yet you must not believe I am so ill as this Letter may look, for if ever there was a person born without the faculty of hoping I am he. Severn is writing to Haslam, and I have just asked him to request Haslam to send you his account of my health. O what an account I could give you of the Bay of Naples if I could once more feel myself a Citizen



## Keats's Letters

of this world — I feel a spirit in my Brain would lay it forth pleasantly — O what a misery it is to have an intellect in splints ! My Love again to Fanny — tell Tootts<sup>1</sup> I wish I could pitch her a basket of grapes — and tell Sam the fellows catch here with a line a little fish much like an anchovy, pull them up fast. Remember me to Mr. and Mrs. Dilke — mention to Brown that I wrote him a letter at Portsmouth which I did not send and am in doubt if he ever will see it.

my dear Mrs. Brawne

Yours sincerely and affectionate

JOHN KEATS —

Good bye Fanny ! God bless you.

### CLXII.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

Naples,

1 November [1820].

MY DEAR BROWN : — Yesterday we were let out of quarantine, during which my health suffered more from bad air and the stifled cabin than it had done the whole voyage. The fresh air revived me a little, and I hope I am well enough this morning to write to you a short calm letter ; — if that can be called one, in which I am afraid to speak of what I would fainest dwell upon. As I have gone thus far into it, I must go on a little ; — perhaps it may relieve the load of *wretchedness* which presses upon me. The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. My dear Brown, I should have had her when I was in health, and I should have remained well. I can bear to die — I

<sup>1</sup> Probably Margaret Brawne, Fanny's younger sister.

## Keats's Letters

cannot bear to leave her. O, God! God! God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her — I see her — I hear her. There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her a moment. This was the case when I was in England; I cannot recollect, without shuddering, the time that I was a prisoner at Hunt's, and used to keep my eyes fixed on Hampstead all day. Then there was a good hope of seeing her again — Now! — O that I could be buried near where she lives! I am afraid to write to her — to receive a letter from her — to see her handwriting would break my heart — even to hear of her anyhow, to see her name written, would be more than I can bear. My dear Brown, what am I to do? Where can I look for consolation or ease? If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me. Indeed, through the whole of my illness, both at your house and at Kentish Town, this fever has never ceased wearing me out. When you write to me, which you will do immediately, write to Rome (*poste restante*) — if she is well and happy, put a mark thus +; if —

Remember me to all. I will endeavour to bear my miseries patiently. A person in my state of health should not have such miseries to bear. Write a short note to my sister, saying you have heard from me. Severn is very well. If I were in better health I would urge your coming to Rome. I fear there is no one can give me any comfort. Is there any news of George? O, that something fortunate had ever happened to me or my brothers! — then I might hope, — but despair is forced upon me as a habit. My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate for ever. I cannot say a word about Naples; I do not feel at all concerned in the thousand novelties around me. I am afraid to write to her — I should like her to know that

## Keats's Letters

I do not forget her. Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing so much misery. Was I born for this end? God bless her, and her mother, and my sister, and George, and his wife, and you, and all!

Your ever affectionate friend,

JOHN KEATS.

*Thursday* [2 November 1820]. — I was a day too early for the Courier. He sets out now. I have been more calm to-day, though in a half dread of not continuing so. I said nothing of my health; I know nothing of it; you will hear Severn's account, from Haslam. I must leave off. You bring my thoughts too near to Fanny. God bless you!

### CLXIII.

TO CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN

Rome 30 November 1820.

MY DEAR BROWN: — 'Tis the most difficult thing in the world to me to write a letter. My stomach continues so bad, that I feel it worse on opening any book, — yet I am much better than I was in quarantine. Then I am afraid to encounter the pro-ing and con-ing of anything interesting to me in England. I have an habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that I am leading a posthumous existence. God knows how it would have been — but it appears to me — however, I will not speak of that subject. I must have been at Bedhampton nearly at the time you were writing to me from Chichester — how unfortunate — and to pass on the river too! There was my star predominant! I cannot answer anything in your letter, which followed me from Naples to Rome, because I am

## Keats's Letters

afraid to look it over again. I am so weak (in mind) that I cannot bear the sight of any handwriting of a friend I love so much as I do you. Yet I ride the little horse, and, at my worst, even in quarantine, summoned up more puns, in a sort of desperation, in one week than in any year of my life. There is one thought enough to kill me; I have been well, healthy, alert, &c., walking with her, and now — the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem, are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach. There, you rogue, I put you to the torture; but you must bring your philosophy to bear, as I do mine, really, or how should I be able to live? Dr. Clark is very attentive to me; he says, there is very little the matter with my lungs, but my stomach, he says, is very bad. I am well disappointed in hearing good news from George, for it runs in my head we shall all die young. I have not written to Reynolds yet, which he must think very neglectful; being anxious to send him a good account of my health, I have delayed it from week to week. If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness; and if I should not, all my faults will be forgiven. Severn is very well, though he leads so dull a life with me. Remember me to all friends, and tell Haslam I should not have left London without taking leave of him, but from being so low in body and mind. Write to George as soon as you receive this, and tell him how I am, as far as you can guess; and also a note to my sister — who walks about my imagination like a ghost — she is so like Tom. I can scarcely bid you good-bye, even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow.

God bless you!

JOHN KEATS.





The Character and Genius of  
John Keats









# The Character and Genius of John Keats

By Wm. Carew

THE touching circumstances of Keats's illness and death<sup>1</sup> in Rome attract universally, as none do here were known, the sympathy of every generous mind. Furthermore, as the world knows, in the expression of that sympathy was Shelley. He had been misinformed as to the degree in which the critics had contributed to Keats's sufferings, and believing that they had killed him, was full both of righteous wrath against the offenders, and of generous regret for what the world had lost. Upon the receipt of that double inspiration Shelley wrote, —

"And a whirlwind of thought came down from the spiritus."

<sup>1</sup> From the last days of February till mid-way middle evening came to pass peacefully in him. On the 23d of that month, wrote Keats, "about four, the approach of death came on. 'Dinner — I — did me up — I was dying — I shall die very, very, in a moment — be deep and thank God it has come.' I lifted up my eyes. The phlegm seemed swelling in his throat, and increased until shortly, when he gradually went into death, as quiet as I will except for himself. Three days later his body was buried, attended by seven of our English in Rome, and laid out along, to the grave in their velvet and velvet covering which his wife and Shelley's daughter had given him. The passage to the English was the same. It was two days after that the remains of Keats were laid in their last resting-place beside his friend.

1835

1835

1835



*Bust of Keats, by Miss Anne Whitney.*

"My bust of Keats was made from a mask of the living man." — *Anne Whitney*.  
This portrait bust was executed by the artist and placed in Hampstead Parish Church, London, and is an expression of appreciation by American admirers of the poet.

# The Character and Genius of John Keats

By Sidney Colvin

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THE touching circumstances of Keats's illness and death<sup>1</sup> at Rome aroused naturally, as soon as they were known, the sympathy of every generous mind. Foremost, as the world knows, in the expression of that sympathy was Shelley. He had been misinformed as to the degree in which the critics had contributed to Keats's sufferings, and believing that they had killed him, was full both of righteous wrath against the offenders, and of passionate regret for what the world had lost. Under the stress of that double inspiration Shelley wrote, —

“And a whirlwind of music came sweet from the spheres.”

<sup>1</sup> From the first days of February the end was visibly drawing near. It came peacefully at last. On the 23d of that month, writes Severn, “about four, the approaches of death came on. ‘Severn — I — lift me up — I am dying — I shall die easy; don't be frightened — be firm, and thank God it has come.’ I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat, and increased until eleven, when he gradually sank into death, so quiet, that I still thought he slept.” Three days later his body was carried, attended by several of the English in Rome who had heard his story, to its grave in that retired and verdant cemetery which for his sake and Shelley's has become a place of pilgrimage to the English race for ever. It was but the other day that the remains of Severn were laid in their last resting-place beside his friend.



## Character and Genius of Keats

As an utterance of abstract pity and indignation, "Adonais" is unsurpassed in literature: with its hurrying train of beautiful spectral images, and the irresistible current and thrilling modulation of its verse, it is perhaps the most perfect and sympathetic effort of Shelley's art: while its strain of transcendental consolation for mortal loss contains the most lucid exposition of his philosophy. But of Keats as he actually lived the elegy presents no feature, while the general impression it conveys of his character and fate is erroneous. A similar false impression was at the same time conveyed, to a circle of readers incommensurably wider than that reached by Shelley, in the well-known stanzas of "Don Juan." In regard to Keats Byron tried both to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. When the *Edinburgh* praised him, he was furious, and on receipt of the "Lamia" volume wrote with vulgar savagery to Murray:—"No more Keats, I entreat:—flay him alive;—if some of you don't I must skin him myself." Then after his death, hearing that it had been caused by the critics, he turns against the latter, and cries:—"I would not be the person who wrote that homicidal article for all the honour and glory of the world." In the "Don Juan" passage he contrived to have his fling at the reviewers and at the weakness, as he imagined it, of their victim in the same breath.

Taken together with the notion of "Johnny Keats" to which *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* had previously given currency, the "Adonais" and the "Don Juan" passage alike tended to fix in the public mind an impression of Keats's character as that of a weakling to whom the breath of detraction had been poison. It was long before his friends, who knew that he was "as like Johnny Keats as the Holy Ghost," did anything effectual to set his memory right. Brown had been bent on doing so from the first, but in the end wrote only a brief memoir, still in manu-

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script. For anything like a full biography George Keats in America could alone have supplied the information; but against him, since he had failed to send help to his poet-brother in the hour of need (having been in truth simply unable to do so), Brown had unluckily conceived so harsh a prejudice that friendly communication between them became impossible. Neither was Dilke, who alone among Keats's friends in England took George's part, disposed under the circumstances to help Brown in his task. For a long time George himself hoped to superintend and supply materials for a life of his brother, but partly his want of literary experience, and partly the difficulty of leaving his occupations in the West, prevented him. Mr. Taylor, the publisher, also at one time wished to be Keats's biographer, and with the help of Woodhouse collected materials for the purpose; but in the end failed to use them. The same wish was entertained by John Hamilton Reynolds, whose literary skill, and fine judgment and delicacy, should have made him of all the poet's friends the most competent for the work. But of these many projects not one had been carried out, when five and twenty years after Keats's death a younger man, who had never seen him, took up the task,—the Monckton Milnes of those days, the Lord Houghton freshly remembered by us all,—and with help from nearly all Keats's surviving friends, and by the grace of his own genial and sympathetic temper, set the memory of the poet in its true light in the beautiful and moving book with which every student is familiar.

Keats had indeed enemies within his house, apart (if the separation can with truth be made) from the secret presence of that worst enemy of all, inherited disease, which killed him. He had a nature all tingling with pride and sensitiveness: he had the perilous capacity and appetite for pleasure to which he owns when he speaks of his own

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“exquisite sense of the luxurious”: and with it the besetting tendency to self-torment which he describes as his “horrid morbidity of temperament.” The greater his credit that on the one hand he gave way so little to self-indulgence, and that on the other he battled so bravely with the spirits that plagued him. To the bridle thus put on himself he alludes in his unaffected way when he speaks of the “violence of his temperament, continually smothered up.” Left fatherless at eight, motherless at fifteen, and subject, during the forming years of his life which followed, to no other discipline but that of apprenticeship in a suburban surgery, he showed in his life such generosity, modesty, humour, and self-knowledge, such a spirit of conduct and degree of self-control, as would have done honour to one infinitely better trained and less hardly tried. His hold over himself gave way, indeed, under the stress of passion, and as a lover he betrays all the weak places of his nature. But we must remember his state of health when the passion seized, and the worse state into which it quickly threw, him, as well as the lack there was in her who caused it, — not indeed, so far as we can judge, of kindness and loyalty, but certainly, it would seem, of the woman’s finer genius of tact and tenderness. Under another kind of trial, when the work he offered to the world, in all soberness of self-judgment and of hope, was thrust back upon him with jibes and insult, he bore himself with true dignity: and if the practical consequences preyed upon his mind, it was not more than reason and the state of his fortunes justified.

In all ordinary relations of life, his character was conspicuous alike for manly spirit and sweetness. No man who ever lived has inspired in his friends a deeper or more devoted affection. Haslam wrote while the poet lay dying: “Keats must get himself again, Severn, if but for me — I cannot afford to lose him: if I know what it is to love I

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truly love John Keats." The following is from a letter of Brown written also during his illness: — "he is present to me every where and at all times, — he now seems sitting here at my side, and looking hard into my face. . . . So much as I have loved him, I never knew how closely he was wound about my heart."<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, speaking of the time of his first attack, Brown says: — "while I waited on him his instinctive generosity, his acceptance of my offices, by a glance of his eye, or motion of his hand, made me regard my mechanical duty as absolutely nothing compared to his silent acknowledgment. Something like this, Severn, his last nurse, observed to me":<sup>2</sup> and we know in fact how the whole life of Severn, prolonged nearly sixty years after his friend's death, was coloured by the light reflected from his memory. When Lord Houghton's book came out in 1848, Archdeacon Bailey wrote from Ceylon to thank the writer for doing merited honour to one "whose genius I did not, and do not, more fully admire than I entirely loved the *Man*."<sup>3</sup> The points on which all who knew him especially dwell are two. First his high good sense and spirit of honour; as to which let one witness stand for many. "He had a soul of noble integrity," says Bailey: "and his common sense was a conspicuous part of his character. Indeed his character was, in the best sense, manly." Next, his beautiful unselfishness and warmth of sympathy. This is the rarest quality of genius, which, from the very intensity of its own life and occupations, is apt to be self-absorbed, requiting the devotion it receives with charm, which costs it nothing, — but with charm only, and when the trial comes, refusing to friendship any real sacrifice of its own objects or inclinations. But when genius to charm adds true unselfishness, and is ready to throw all the ardour of its own life into the cares and interests of those about it, then we

<sup>1</sup> Severn MSS.

<sup>2</sup> Houghton MSS.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



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have what in human nature is most worthy of love. And this is what his companions found in Keats. "He was the sincerest friend," cries Reynolds, "the most lovable associate, — the deepest listener to the griefs and distresses of all around him, — 'That ever lived in this tide of times.'"<sup>1</sup> To the same effect Haydon: — "He was the most unselfish of human creatures: unadapted to this world, he cared not for himself, and put himself to any inconvenience for the sake of his friends. . . . He had a kind, gentle heart, and would have shared his fortune with any one who wanted it." And again Bailey: —

"With his friends, a sweeter tempered man I never knew, than was John Keats. Gentleness was indeed his proper characteristic, without one particle of dulness, or insipidity, or want of spirit. . . . In his letters he talks of *suspecting* everybody. It appeared not in his conversation. On the contrary he was uniformly the apologist for poor frail human nature, and allowed for people's faults more than any man I ever knew, and especially for the faults of his friends. But if any act of wrong or oppression, of fraud or falsehood, was the topic, he rose into sudden and animated indignation."<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, "he had no fears of self," says George Keats, "through interference in the quarrels of others, he would at all hazards, and without calculating his powers to defend, or his reward for the deed, defend the oppressed and distressed with heart and soul, with hand and purse."

In this chorus of admiring affection, Haydon alone must assert his own superiority by mixing depreciation with praise. When he laments over Keats's dissipations, he exaggerates, there is evidence enough to show, idly and calumniously. When on the other hand he speaks of the poet's "want of decision of character and power of will," and says that "never for two days did he know his own intentions," his

<sup>1</sup> Houghton MSS.    <sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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criticism is deserving of more attention. This is only Haydon's way of describing a fact in Keats's nature of which no one was better aware than himself. He acknowledges his own "unsteady and vagarish disposition." What he means is no weakness of instinct or principle affecting the springs of conduct in regard to others, but a liability to veerings of opinion and purpose in regard to himself. "The Celtic instability," a reader may perhaps surmise who adopts that hypothesis as to the poet's descent. Whether the quality was one of race or not, it was probably inseparable from the peculiar complexion of Keats's genius. Or rather it was an expression in character of that which was the very essence of that genius, the predominance, namely, of the sympathetic imagination over every other faculty. Acute as was his own emotional life, he nevertheless belonged essentially to the order of poets whose work is inspired, not mainly by their own personality, but by the world of things and men outside them. He realized clearly the nature of his own gift, and the degree to which susceptibility to external impressions was apt to overpower in him, not practical consistency only, but even the sense of a personal identity.

"As to the poetic character itself," he writes, "(I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egoistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself — it has no self — it is everything and nothing — it has no character — it enjoys light and shade — it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated, — it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity; he is continually in for, and filling, some other body. . . . If then, he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not

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at that very instant have been cogitating on the characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess, but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature."

"Even now," he says on another occasion, "I am perhaps not speaking from myself, but from some character in whose soul I now live." Keats was often impatient of this Protean quality of his own mind. "I would call the head and top of those who have a proper self," he says, "men of power": and it is the men of power, the men of trenchant individuality and settled aims, that in the sphere of practical life he most admires. But in the sphere of thought and imagination his preference is dictated by the instinctive bent of his own genius. In that sphere he is impatient, in turn, of all intellectual narrowness, and will not allow that poetry should make itself the exponent of any single creed or given philosophy. Thus in speaking of what he thinks too doctrinal and pedagogic in the work of Wordsworth: —

"For the sake," he asks, "of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. . . . We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul."

This is but one of many passages in which Keats proclaims the necessity, for a poet, of an all-embracing receptivity and openness of mind. His critics sometimes speak as if his aim had been merely to create a paradise of art

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and beauty remote from the cares and interests of the world. If the foregoing pages have been written to any purpose, the reader will be aware that no criticism can be more mistaken. At the creation, the revelation, of beauty Keats aimed indeed invariably, but of beauty wherever its elements existed: — "I have loved," as he says, "the principle of beauty in all things." His conception of the kingdom of poetry was Shakespearean, including the whole range of life and imagination, every affection of the soul and every speculation of the mind. Of that kingdom he lived long enough to enter on and possess certain provinces only, those that by their manifest and prevailing charm first and most naturally allure the spirit of youth. Would he have been able to make the rest also his own? Would the faculties that were so swift to reveal the hidden delights of nature, to divine the true spirit of antiquity, to conjure with the spell of the Middle Age, — would they with time have gained equal power to unlock the mysteries of the heart, and, still in obedience to the law of beauty, to illuminate and harmonize the great struggles and problems of human life?

My belief is that such power they would not have failed to gain. From the height to which the genius of Keats arose during the brief period between its first effervescence and its exhaustion, — from the glowing humanity of his own nature, and the completeness with which, by the testimony alike of his own consciousness and his friends' experience, he was accustomed to live in the lives of others, — from the gleams of true greatness of mind which shine not only in his poetry, but equally amid the gossip and pleasantries of his familiar letters, — from all our evidences, in a word, as to what he was as well as from what he did, — I think it probable that by power, as well as by temperament and aim, he was the most Shakespearean spirit that has lived since Shakespeare; the



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true Marcellus, as his first biographer has called him, of the realm of English song; and that in his premature death our literature has sustained its greatest loss. Something like this, it would seem, is also the opinion of his foremost successors, as Lord Tennyson, Mr. Browning, Mr. Matthew Arnold. Others have formed a different judgment: but among those unfortunate guests at the banquet of life, the poets called away before their time, who can really adjudge the honours that would have been due had they remained? In a final estimate of any writer's work, we must take into account not what he might have done, but only what he did. And in the work actually left by Keats, the master-chord of humanity, we shall admit, had not yet been struck with fulness. When we sum up in our minds the total effect of his poetry, we can think, indeed, of the pathos of "Isabella," but of that alone, as equally powerful in its kind with the nature-magic of the "Hymn to Pan" and the "Ode to a Nightingale," with the glow of romance colour in "St. Agnes's Eve," the weirdness of romance sentiment in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the conflict of elemental force with fate in "Hyperion," the revelations of the soul of ancient life and art in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the fragment of an "Ode to Maia."

It remains to glance at the influence exercised by Keats on the poets who have come after him. In two ways chiefly, I should say, has that influence been operative. First on the subject-matter of poetry, in kindling and informing in other souls the poetic love of nature for her own sake, and also, in equal degrees, the love both of classic fable and of romance. And secondly on its form, in setting before poets a certain standard of execution — a standard not of technical correctness, for which Keats never cared sufficiently, but of that quality to which he himself refers when he speaks of "loading every rift of a

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subject with ore." We may define it as the endeavour after a continual positive poetic richness and felicity of phrase. A typical instance is to be found in the lines that tell us of the trembling hopes of Madeline, —

"But to her heart her heart was voluble,  
Paining with eloquence her balmy side."

The beauty of such a phrase is no mere beauty of fancy or of sound; it is the beauty which resides in truth only, every word being chosen and every touch laid by a vital exercise of the imagination. The first line describes in perfection the duality of consciousness in such a moment of suspense, the second makes us realize at once the physical effect of the emotion on the heroine, and the spell of her imagined presence on ourselves. In so far as Keats has taught other poets really to write like this, his influence has been wholly to their advantage, — but not so when for this quality they give us only its simulacrum, in the shape of brilliancies merely verbal and a glitter not of gold. The first considerable writer among Keats's successors on whom his example took effect was Hood, in the fairy and romance poems of his earlier time. The dominant poet of the Victorian age, Tennyson, has been profoundly influenced by it both in the form and the matter of his art, and is indeed the heir of Keats and of Wordsworth in almost equal degrees. After or together with Coleridge, Keats has also contributed most, among English writers, to the poetic method and ideals of Rossetti and his group. Himself, as we have seen, alike by gifts and training a true child of the Elizabethans, he thus stands in the most direct line of descent between the great poets of that age and those, whom posterity has yet to estimate, of our own day.

Such, I think, is Keats's historic place in English literature. What his place was in the hearts of those who best

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knew him, we have just learned from their own lips. The days of the years of his life were few and evil, but above his grave the double aureole of poetry and friendship shines immortally.

THE END.











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